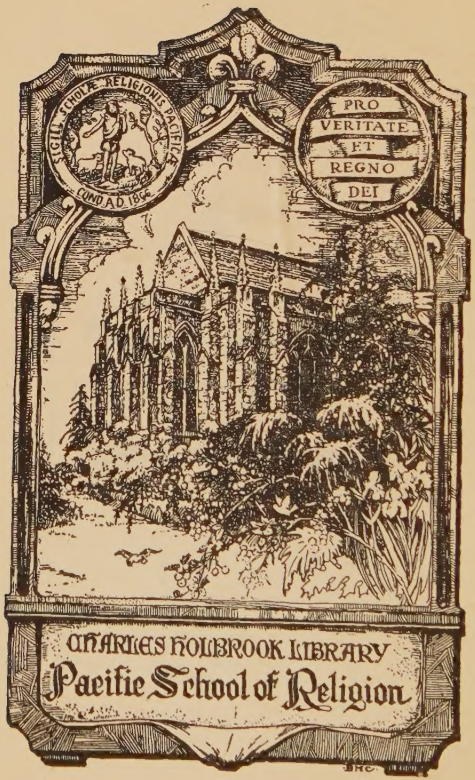
THE PROMISED LAND

GILBERT PARKER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THE PROMISED LAND

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THE PROMISED LAND

A Story of David in Israel

BY

GILBERT PARKER

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Fear not, Abraham: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward

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Heinrich Heine, writing of the Psalms of David:

Sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfilment—the whole drama of humanity.

Thomas Carlyle in "Heroes and Hero Worship":

David, the Hebrew King, had fallen into sins enough, blackest crimes; there was no want of sins. . . . What are faults, what are the outward details of life, if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it, be forgotton? . . . Of all acts, is not, for a man, *repentance* the most divine? . . . David's life and history, as written for us in those psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking, in truth, always that: "A succession of falls"? Man can do no other. In this wild element of a life he has to struggle onwards; now fallen, deep-abased; and ever, with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again still onwards. That his struggle *be* a faithful unconquerable one, that is the question of questions.

Lord Ernle (Rowland E. Prothero) in "The Psalms in Human Life":

Fathers of the early Church like Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome, Basil, Ambrose and Augustine—apostles of British Christianity such as Columba, Cuthbert, Wilfrid, Dunstan and Bede—mediæval saints like Bernard, Francis of Assisi, or Thomas of Villanova—statesmen like Ximenes, Burghley and Gladstone—have testified to the universal truth and beauty of the psalms. With a psalm upon their lips died Wyclif, Hus, and Jerome of Prague, Luther and Melancthon—philosophers such as Bacon and Locke and Hamilton—men of science like Humboldt and Romanes—among missionaries Xavier, Martin, Duff, Livingstone, Mackay and Hannington—explorers like Columbus—scholars like Casaubon and Salmasius—earthly potentates like Charlemagne, Vladimir, Catherine de Medicis, Charles V, Henry of Navarre, and Mary Queen of Scots—have found in the psalms their inspiration in life, their strength in peril, or their support in death.

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THE PROMISED LAND

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CHAPTER I

THE PLOUGH AND THE SLING

"AM not I of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? Wherefore speakest thou after this manner?"

These were the words of Saul, the son of Kish, a rich and mighty man of the tribe of Benjamin, ever valorous and powerful.

Saul had remarkable stature and beauty and was modest and strong. He had gone in search of asses lost from his father's farm in the valley of Ephraim. In the land of Zuph, at Ramah the college for students of the priesthood, Saul with his servant inquired the way of the house of the prophet. They thought they had no money, and it was the custom of Eastern nations to approach the great with a gift! They were troubled in spirit, but at last the servant found the fourth of a shekel of silver in his pocket.

Samuel, the Nazarite, was a judge in Israel and went on circuit to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh, returning always to Naioth at Ramah where the students lived.

In bitter protest the people of Israel had come to Samuel. They disliked and feared his corrupt priestly sons and they dreaded one of them becoming prophet after Samuel. They said the prophet was old and he should make them a king as all surrounding nations had. He, knowing their hearts, appealed to Jehovah, who thus commanded Samuel: "Hearken unto their voices and make them a king!"

It was soon after this revelation that Saul and his servant sought the prophet at Ramah. They found him in the doorway, a stately, commanding figure with long grey hair and beard and a deep and searching eye. Saul said: "Oh seer Samuel, whom all our tribe loveth, we beg thee, tell us where my father's lost asses are. They have fled from our home at Gibeah." With these words he humbly offered Samuel the small coin from his servant's tunic.

The prophet, who at once saw in Saul the one destined to be anointed by Jehovah's command, smiled gently at him. Then he dropped both hands on Saul's shoulders: "Why troublest thou thyself about a drove of asses? Something far higher should fill thy thoughts, for is it not to thee the fate of Israel belongs?"

Saul looked at Samuel in grave dismay. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of Benjamin? Wherefore speakest thou after this manner?"

The prophet scanned his splendid figure, a head and shoulders greater than any other man in Israel, with his bold, strong face, black eyes and bronzed hair, and he said: "Come, eat with me."

Saul went with Samuel to a place on the top of the hill called Ramah. It was a place of sacrifice. It had a chamber with an altar, a stone pillar, a wooden pole and a laver for washings, and sacred halls called high places. Low benches were around the walls and here sat thirty elders. They had been called together by Samuel after Jehovah had revealed His will. They were dignified and sedate elders of all Judah, and they sat talking in quiet tones. They were learned in the Jewish law and were men of mark among the people. When Samuel entered with Saul they stood up and bowed low.

Samuel motioned them to their seats and they looked with amazement at Saul, whom they knew as the son of Kish. After a few moments' talk with them Samuel, stretching his

arms, prayed: "O Jehovah, God of our fathers, be with us now."

In preparation for the meal at this conference three of Samuel's servants had killed some lambs and they were roasting them. The servants stood beside the bright fire and with long branches of the terebinth tree thrust through the bodies of the lambs they slowly turned them in the flame, their faces shining in the light. They murmured to each other and they knew that some of the remnants of the feast would come to them. At last to the chamber where Samuel, Saul and the elders sat, Saul silent and perturbed, the servants brought the dishes of lambs and lentils and peas and beans and dates, and placed them smoking on the table. Yet the elders did not touch the food. They watched the prophet closely. They were astounded to see Samuel's fingers take the best portion of one of the lambs and with due ritual hand it to Saul: "Eat this, and the blessing of Jehovah be on thee, Saul."

Saul took the sacred portion, and after looking at the face of Samuel, raised the lamb to his trembling lips. Then he closed his eyes and ate.

He had eaten the sacred portion of the feast usually given to the priest, and Samuel, turning to the elders, said: "I obey Jehovah's command. It marks a new day for our people."

The elders in great agitation whispered together, and then one said: "Is, then, the day of the judges over?"

"Tomorrow ye shall know all, but know now that this son of Kish has come to me after searching for his lost asses. When I saw him I said: 'Behold, the Lord's anointed!' So it shall be. This is the greatest day Israel has ever known."

They ate the food only with their fingers, standing part of the time, and at last Samuel stretched his hands and blessed them all.

When the feast was finished all the elders stood at the door and watched Samuel and Saul depart; then they turned and talked together and presently hastened to tell the people.

Samuel brought Saul back to Naioth and took him to the roof to sleep.

So far as eye could see in the glow of sunset were acacia and terebinth and olive and carob trees and all round the hill were flowers and swaying reeds in the evening light. The hum of bees came to them, the singing of the people, and the occasional cry of a wandering jackal.

For long they sat in silence, Saul overwhelmed by the events of the day, Samuel brooding. At last the prophet, with a hand upon the arm of Saul, said:

"I gave thee the sacred portion of the feast today. Now I would speak of the history of the Israelites. We were a great people in the days of Abraham and in those of all the prophets until now, but we were long in Egypt as slaves and Moses brought us out. We were under the Canaanites also for twenty years, and from them we were delivered by Barak and Deborah, and they ruled us for twenty years, and then came judges like Joshua and Gideon. Afterwards Samson ruled. He was betrayed by Delilah and blinded by the Philistines. He tore down the house where they feasted and made sport of him, and he slew more in his death than in his life. In the sacrifice of his own life he saw the everlasting light. To the Philistines we are vassals now. They are in every town and village in Israel. My mother was Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, who had several wives with children and my mother had none, and after Eli, the prophet, moved by her sorrow, had prayed to Jehovah, I was born. With the dawn breaking over the hills of Judah she sang:

" 'The Lord killeth and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. He raiseth the poor out of dust and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the Earth are the Lord's and He hath set the world upon them.'

"I lived in the house of Eli the prophet and was trained by him. I have served Jehovah long as a prophet. To thee

I say: Thou shalt be King of Israel in a time not far. Our days have been dark but light cometh soon. We have been broken, but we shall be mended. We have been overcome but we shall triumph. Here sleep and in the morning I will come again."

While all this chanced to Saul, near to the town of Bethlehem in Judah was the great farm of Jesse the Benjamite, who, with his seven sons, Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, Nethaneel, Raddai, Ozem and David, lived in a huge house. It was four miles from Ramah. They were all expert farmers, but David, the youngest, was a shepherd—the least considered of all the family. In the hills, with his kinnor* he tended the sheep and lived a life which made him sturdy and handsome and imaginative. His mother Judith was descended from Rahab, a wanton but able woman of older days, by whose amazing skill the Israelites entered the Promised Land under Joshua, and by his father from Ruth the Moabite who married Boaz.

The life of a shepherd had danger. Bears and lions and other wild beasts prowled among the sheep, and David's only weapons were the sling made of goat's hair and the staff he always carried. He was not lonely because in his mind the hills of Judah were full of people, and he talked and sang as though they were ever present.

His beautiful voice was the pulse of his soul. His eyes were alight as with the dew of morning. Many a time he talked to his sheep as though they were human beings. He was so much among them they had become personal friends. He called them by name, and they came to him. One day he chanted to them.

"Brothers, ye are far off, yet are very near. Ye have no brains but ye have feeling, the soul of life. There are many sheep in the land of Jordan but none like those of Bethlehem. We are far from the rule of the prophets but near to this melodious life. Here all life is singing unto Heaven. Hear ye

* Small harp.

not the throb of these great hills? This melody brings us near to Eden where Adam lived and all the world began."

He had scarcely sung these words when he saw a lion crawling towards the sheep. He got up swiftly and with his staff ran to face the beast. Its eyes were glowing, its body was crouched to spring, but he struck it on the head three times. It seized him, but he thrust the club into its mouth and struggled. His body was like a whipcord and wire and he had no fear. The fight almost brought blood to his eyes and it whitened his cheek, but he fought on, and at last the lion lay dead.

David looked at his hands. They were smeared with blood, but he smiled at his light hurts, and raising his eyes he said: "All is well. In the hilltops of Judah God's law prevails. Thou, Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the lifter up of mine head. I will not be afraid of ten thousand that set themselves against me round about."

In his father's house Miriam and Leah, the children of Nethaneel, entered the chamber where all the family were. Leah, who would play a great part in Israel, listened to all that was said with watchfulness. She was only ten, dark-haired and dark-eyed. She had a face attractive to many, and she gave great promise.

Eliab, the eldest, said to his father: "All is not well in this land now."

Jesse, with his strong, aged body, shaggy head and powerful voice, replied calmly, for he had lived long and had seen much, and he had great faith and hope: "Jehovah hath been with us long. He will preserve us still."

And Nethaneel, Leah's father, low-browed, dark-hearted, said: "Our end will be like the Dead Sea. We shall be suckled in the brine."

Ozem looked up. He was much younger and always cheerful. "Rather we are like the river Jordan. It will carry us to the Promised Land."

Leah, who had a mind that would be ever close to David and her people, whispered to Miriam: "I like grandfather's words and so will uncle David."

Out in the hills David slept and dreamed of the Promised Land.

CHAPTER II

THE MOTHER OF BATHSHEBA

THE next day was one of great beauty at Ramah. There was scarce a cloud in the sky, and the sun seemed the centre of hope and the dawning faith of Israel and Judah. The great valley below Ramah had pomegranates, oleanders, the briar, the myrtle and the rose, the fir and the terebinth, the pine and the cedar, the oak, and all manner of birds and flowers and song. This famous land, so distant, so obscure, was quivering on the banks of fate, and fate was God, and God was the friend of Israel.

Saul had slept on the roof and had waked in the night, and seen the bright stars shining overhead, and the mystic moon, had heard the soft swish of the trees, and his soul was waking to his destiny. His huge body, clean and strong and wholesome, was alive with a new sense, a new thrill of power. He had watched the flaming sun rise over the distant hills, with the glamour of magnificent history to come. He looked abroad over the roofs, for the house stood high, and his heart beat hard against his breast. He did not understand. He was still on the bank of that stream which was to bear him to mystery and glory and doom, to great achievements and great defeats, to power and loss, to great deeds done and evil done, to dementia, to hopeless struggle, and to a brave but ignoble death.

He rose from his bed and an hour later joined Samuel, whose benignant brooding eye was upon him in pride and

hope. Samuel's words were few: "Greeting and love to thee, Saul, and blessing to thy steps."

The meal of dates and grapes and lentils, and bread and milk ended, Samuel took a vial of sacred oil from a cupboard and asked Saul to follow him. Through the streets they went, and at the end of the place, with naught between them and the rising sun but the hills where no man could be seen, Samuel bade Saul kneel, and he poured upon Saul's head the vial of sacred oil. Then he kissed him and said:

"The Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance! His spirit will come upon thee, and thou shalt be turned into another man, and at last thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I will come down unto thee there, to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days shalt thou tarry till I come to show what thou shalt do."

Saul rose from his knees and stretched his great body, and in his eyes was the new light of hope and purpose, and the will to do great things for his native land; and God gave him a new heart. Samuel and he walked back to the house from which they had come.

The people who watched them pass through the streets, gazed with admiration at the imposing figure of Saul, and seemed to wake to his and their destiny. The priests from Samuel's school gathered round them, and the pulsations of the struggles to come trembled through them. As Samuel and Saul moved on, the voice of a woman rang out: "Hail, thou saviour of our people. Alleluia to Saul! God's blessings to thee, Saul."

It was the voice of the mother of Bathsheba of Bethlehem, who had the spirit of her people deep in her, and had visions of great days.

Saul raised his hand in greeting, and in a ringing voice she repeated her words and added: "All Israel will follow thee, Saul, son of Kish."

The prophet Samuel swung slowly upon the woman: "Get

thee to thy home. Nurse thy child and obey the law. Who art thou to prophesy? Get thee home to Bethlehem. What doest thou here?"

All that day in Bethlehem, to which Bethsheba's mother brought the story, people moved in excited groups, anxious, disturbed, for things were happening beyond their ken, and vexing their small minds. Among them were some of the sons of Jesse and his daughters and the children of Nethaneel, amazed at Saul's elevation.

David had come down from the hills, leaving his sheep in charge of another shepherd, and he entered Ramah at the time of Saul's anointing. He saw the figure of Samuel the prophet and the majestic figure of Saul, and his heart went out to them both. Among his high hills he had found the spirit which should go far in the days to come in Israel, and as Saul and Samuel passed through the streets he cried out: "The blessings of God be with thee, Saul."

His brothers laughed at his enthusiasm; they had no faith in Saul and they loved not David.

He had a mind free from jealousy and ambition. He was sourly welcomed by his brothers; he was only warmly welcomed by his sisters and his nieces, for his brothers held him in disdain as a poor herder of the sheep. His handsomeness irritated them, his glowing eye and beautiful voice made Nethaneel say: "A whited sepulchre."

David laughed: "But I live inside it, Nethaneel."

"Get thee back to thy hills, lizard."

Leah, Nethaneel's daughter, said softly: "Uncle David, hearken not. Lions and bears are in the hills! A lizard does not kill them!"

Samuel sent messengers and gathered the Israelites at Mizpeh, and he caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families. The family of Matri was taken of the tribe of Benjamin, and Saul was summoned. They sought him but he could not be found. He had modestly hidden from the

people to avoid his destiny. And yet his was the simple mind, the untrammelled soul; vigour and power were in his great shoulders and his healthy body. Yet he was troubled, not realizing fully, and even fearing, his destiny.

After much searching he was found and brought to Samuel, who said, raising his hand high: "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen!" And all the people shouted and said: "God save Saul!"

Saul looked upon them all and his soul was touched. "Who am I that I should be the anointed of the Lord? I am naught save for the blessing of Jehovah. I return to my father's house at Gibeah. There I shall await my call."

Women fell upon their knees, and their voices rang in high acclaim. "Saul, son of Israel, how hast thou filled our hearts and faith! Thou shalt go forth a conqueror, thou shalt return a king. Saul, son of Kish, because of thy great stature thou lookest out over all the people; thou shalt look out over all the world because of thy great deeds. Saul, saviour of Israel, Alleluia!"

Samuel shook his head in reproval. "Our hour is not yet come. Get thee home, Saul, and abide the call of God. Let none come thy way, save those who will be with thee in days to come. Go now with my blessing." He raised his hands high and blessed Saul.

As Saul was about to start, Jonathan, his son, about sixteen years old, faced him. He was tall, with dark blue eyes and a face wherein was faith, hope and nobility, and when the people saw him coming swiftly, they raised the cry: "Jonathan, son of Saul, thy family shall save Israel. God save thee, Jonathan."

Never was an Israelite of finer soul, of deeper heart, of better spirit, than Jonathan. Saul would rise and Saul would fall, but Jonathan would keep his steady, unwavering way to the bitter end. He had the bearing of a man of power. He was as yet unmarried, and the women of Bethlehem drew near to him.

Saul said: "Jonathan, I have been anointed, and my soul would find my duty and my place."

Jonathan fell upon his knees. "Bless me, lift thy hand above my head, O my father. Bless me, O my father!"

Saul shook his head: "No, no, not I. The prophet Samuel, he will bless thee," and he turned towards Samuel.

Samuel looked at them both. "I have no blessing for thee, Jonathan, but the God of Abraham will bless thee. Go thy way. Find the truth of things. Be steadfast in thy faith. Get thee home, Saul, and abide the call of God."

Samuel had given Saul three signs by which he would understand the significance of his call. On Saul's journey from the house of Samuel to where Kish, his father, lived, he came upon two men by Rachel's tomb, on the border of Benjamin, who told him that the lost asses were found, and that Kish was sad at the long absence of his son. So it was that as Saul listened to these two men at Rachel's tomb, and nodded to them, he said: "Elah and Kharas, ye bring good news, and I thank ye." He stroked their beards,* and the smile on his lips was their reward.

They replied: "Behold, we praise thy return in safety and honour. The heart of Kish will be glad."

They watched Saul until he was lost to sight, and nodded to each other, and then went on towards Bethlehem.

Saul journeyed on with Jonathan and his servants and friends until he came to a noted terebinth tree, where he met three men travelling to the ancient shrine of Bethel, sacred to the worship of Abraham and Jacob and their forefathers. They were carrying as offerings three kids, three loaves and a bottle of wine. They saluted Saul with the words: "Peace be with you," presenting him with two loaves, showing that he was worthy of all respect, and was sharing in the offerings intended for God's service. This was a sign that the Lord Himself would sustain him if he continued in His way.

Near to his own home, close by a famous monument of

*A sign of friendship with the Jews.

the Philistines, he was met by a company of prophets engaged in their religious exercises, and he felt compelled to share their services. They were from the school of the prophets at Ramah. They were followed by a band of musicians, and they chanted a psalm:

"Israel, Israel, Israel, thou hast come from ancient slavery from the time of Abraham until now. Judges and prophets have ruled thee. Thou hast been in slavery in Egypt for four hundred years. Thou hast been under the rule of the Canaanites and thou art under the spear of the Philistines.

"Israel, Israel, Israel, the dawn of thy new day is come. Thy heart throbs with the hope of freedom from the thrall of the Philistines—the day of liberty and the love of God.

"Israel, Israel, Israel, one cometh to give thee power and strength. He will free thee from thy stumbling and broken way. The light is on the farthest hills, even the heights of Hebron. The day breaks and the shadows flee away.

"Israel, Israel, Israel, he cometh who will lift thee high as the top of Mount Sinai. By the Ark of the Covenant thou shalt prevail.

"Israel, Israel, Israel, the four winds of heaven, the sun and moon and all the stars are with thee and thy hope. Thy day is near. Lift up your hearts, all ye people of Israel, for our saviour is at hand. Israel, Israel, Israel!"

Their instruments were the psaltery, the tabret, the pipe and the kinnor, which were often employed on festive occasions.

When Saul heard their stirring music, his heart was moved. He sent Jonathan on to his father's home. Then he joined in the ecstatic songs and praises. People were astonished to see Saul singing and excited, and they said:

"What has happened to Saul, the son of Kish? Is he also among the prophets?"

They were amazed that one of little cultivation, brought up in rural paths, should join these educated youths in their

happy exercises. They did not see the divine influence in him. But one, wiser than the rest, saw deeper.

"Ye are surprised," he said, "at the son of Kish! Who are the fathers of the other scholars? If their ability comes from God, why not so with Saul?" Thus he said, and the spiritual changes the Holy Spirit was making in Saul's heart were openly shown to all the world. Saul, greatly moved by his experience, did not return to his own home at once but went to the high place in the hill, curiously knobbed with a double top, and there he felt in his awakened soul what was to change his whole life and that of all the people. There on the heights he drank in the spirit of God.

At his father's house he was joyfully received. His father was glad to have his son home again, and made no particular inquiries as to his journey; but Abner, his cousin, the son of Ner, seeing in Saul's face an altered demeanour, the new light of his destiny, was more inquisitive. Saul, who felt that Abner would scheme for the fulfilment of his great promise, told his destiny to none. He remembered Samuel's words: "Let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee. Hold thy peace."

When Abner aand Jonathan moved away from Saul, Ahinoam, the mother of Jonathan, appeared—still young, beautiful and tall, with large, dark eyes, oval pale face, and an exquisite hand. She was of noble stature and dignified contented mind. Jonathan was like her. When Saul felt her enter, he swung round and reached out his arms. She did not respond. She dropped to her knees and murmured: "The blessing come to thee, give unto me, beloved."

Saul's eyes were startled. "How dost thou know Jehovah's blessing hath come to me—how dost thou know?"

She looked up, faintly smiling, and with mist in her eyes she said: "In my dream last night it came to me."

Then she got to her feet and Saul clasped her in his arms.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGERS

SAUL had been all day ploughing, and Jonathan had been sowing, and together towards sunset they made their way towards their home. Saul marched with head bowed, thinking of his new position in Israel. His modesty was deep, his faith unbreakable. He had not yet begun to plan his future, though his eyes had opened wide in the new spirit Jehovah had given him. His immense frame, moving slowly, seemed the symbol of authority. His brooding eye had the look of a dreamer, but his face was impassive and he saw little of the world around him, for he was intent upon inner thoughts.

Jonathan was walking near him, almost as tall as his father, very slim and alert. He had no brooding thoughts, his eyes were on the world around him. His heart was ever steady, ever faithful, his body strong, and presently he touched his father's arm. Saul raised his head. Jonathan pointed towards the setting sun: "See those people running fast. Who are they, think you?"

Saul, recalled from his inner dreams, looked with a flash of anxiety at the approaching people of Gibeon.* They came closer, waving their arms, their faces flushed with feeling. They stopped short, panting.

"Why have ye come?" Saul said.

They tremblingly told him that Nahash, King of the Ammonites, had made a covenant with them that they should serve him, but that their right eye should be put out as a reproach to Israel. They had begged for a seven days' respite, and Nahash showed his contempt for them by granting the seven days.

* The Gibeonites, under false pretences, had induced Joshua to make a covenant with them which since that time had given them special privileges with the Jews.

They had gone first to the Benjaminites, who had reputation for prowess and character. Through all the villages they had told the story and their news had been received with lamentation.

Saul's anger was kindled greatly. He sternly bade them cease to weep. Then he turned and slew his oxen before their eyes and cut them up, and gave the pieces to the little band. He bade them carry them throughout the land with his command: "Whosoever cometh not forth after Samuel and after Saul, so shall it be done unto his oxen."

The loss of the oxen would be a terrible blow to the poor men of Israel, and these Gibeonites picked up the bleeding meat and with shouts of valour ran. Through the villages of Israel they passed, summoning the tribes to Saul's standard, and Saul, his huge body almost rigid with stern resolve, watched them go, nodding his head.

Then he turned to Jonathan. "The day of Israel is come. I go to lead our people against the foe. The tribes of Israel and Judah will gather round my home, and Jehovah will save Israel. No longer shall the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Amalekites and the Moabites plant their fortresses in Israel." He shook his head in resolution and his body seemed to increase in size.

Jonathan's clean-shaven face showed decision and humour. His one ambition was to serve Israel. He was young, but his was the soul of a great fighter. Nahash had menaced the independence of Israel—it was Israel's duty to destroy the Ammonite idolaters. They had also special commands from God concerning the Moabites. He recalled the words: "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter into the assembly of the Lord for ever. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever."

On the defeat of Nahash depended the future of Israel. His eyes searched the face of his father, and what he saw made his heart beat faster, for Saul had been transformed.

What was working in him had given him the soul and spirit of command. His gigantic frame in its loose-flowing robes seemed almost prodigious. With slow but clear tones he repeated the words of Jehovah given by Jonathan, and Saul looked at him with fiercely smiling eyes. He put a hand upon his shoulder.

"My son, I shall command and thou shalt be near me, but not my chief general. He must be older than thou and with greater experience. Like thee, he must have the blood of Kish in his veins!"

Jonathan nodded. "Behold thy cousin Abner. He has great skill in battle, he will serve thee well as thy sarsaba."

Saul's eyes lighted. "Abner—Abner! He is the man! He will act only for the good of our people—Abner, the son of Ner!"

They reached their home. They were met at the door by Ahinoam. She was to be his only wife, and he was to have but one concubine—Rizpah. By his wife he had four sons—Jonathan, Ishui, Melchishua and Ishbosheth.

By instinct Ahinoam felt the great day in Saul's life had come, and her eyes lighted with pride—and yet with pain, because in her deepest soul she felt peril coming. Behind her stood Merab and Michal, their daughters, and behind Merab stood Adriel, the man who would marry her in time to come—an honourable youth not destined for high place in Israel.

Merab was dark, with oval face and brown eyes, of good but inadequate character, but Michal, with her golden hair, dark brown eyes and delicate rounded face, was a girl of striking character and of splendid hope. She did not look like either Saul or Ahinoam, but seemed of a destiny of her own. With temperament, she almost trembled at the sight of Saul and Jonathan, because she felt great things were near, and these would play a vital part in her life.

Saul touched the shoulder of Ahinoam. "Ye all shall go

to the meeting of the tribes at Bezek on the road to Beth-shean."

He looked out over the landscape and his eyes lighted, for in the distant villages he saw the people gathering. At that moment Abner, his cousin, came hurrying to the house. He fell on a knee before Saul and stretched out his arms.

"Saul, son of Kish, I am thy servant, to do with as thou wilt."

Saul touched his hand. "Rise, my cousin. Thou shalt be my chief general and Jonathan shall serve under thee. The soul of Israel is in thee."

Abner happily smiled. "I will serve thee to my life's end."

"Before we go hence let us make sacrifices unto the Lord," said Saul, and out in the gathering dusk the ram and sheep and the pigeons and turtle-doves were slain, and with the evening star shining, they made their sacrifice and oblation, and there came to them through the growing dusk the far-off sounds of an excited and warlike Israel. Something seemed to tremble through the vast hills and valleys—the spirit of the Lord God. At last they moved into the house and lay down on their beds. The women slept brokenly—the most soundly Ahinoam and the least soundly Michal, for in Michal's heart was the quiver of the fate she did not know, but it transfigured her.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONQUEST OF THE AMMONITES

WITH the first glint of the sun, Saul and his family rose. In all their faces was the spirit of Israel like light upon the hilltops. Standing at the door of his house at Gilead, Saul could see Israelites moving fast, and a great stir in the country-side. This was the reply to his message sent by the Gibeonites, and it would be carried into the far-

thest posts of Palestine in the five days still remaining before the men's doom would be imposed by Nahash.

They had just ended their brief morning meal when men of Judah, excited and armed, gathered at the house of Saul and saluted him wildly. Saul came out briefly and spoke to them:

"Brothers of the tribes of Judah and Israel, today begins a new life for our people. The prophet Samuel has called me to lead you all against the foe. I doubt not the end. Confidence, hope and security are with me. The day of Israel shall shine to the high moon. The Ammonites shall fall. The Moabites, the Philistines and all our foes shall be under the hammer of God—the dust for Israel and Judah to scatter."

His huge figure swelled, his beard was brown and full, and he had the look of a great warrior. The visitors raised their goads and bows and slings and a few spears and swords, and the air was wild with cries.

"May good come to thee, Saul! Thou shalt hold us to the service of God and Israel's and Judah's glory!"

Saul beckoned Abner to him. "My cousin Abner is my sarsaba. Ye know him well. The army shall build this land into a new and noble independence." He raised a hand towards heaven: "The hour of freedom is near!"

Three of David's brothers, Eliab, Shammah and Nethaneel were present. At Saul's stout words Eliab turned to Nethaneel and said: "His talk is big, but what will his deeds be?"

Nethaneel snarled. "This son of Anak will go as the Anakites went."

Shammah laughed. "I share not your hatred of Saul. He is our fellow-tribesman, he is the son of Kish and for Israel's sake we should have faith. As Samuel has anointed him, we should have pride in him. We are sick of the judges; let us give all now to the coming king."

Eliab shrugged a shoulder. "When he proves himself as

he will tomorrow, I then will take my stand with him, but now I stand with Judah."

Saul saw them and he beckoned. They glanced at each other doubtfully but came forward.

"Ye are the sons of Jesse the Bethlemite, is it not so?" And Nethaneel answered: "It is so."

Saul smiled and there was in his smile the charm and modesty of his early life, and it conquered them.

"Ye are all good Bethlemites. Ye are of Judah. Together with our friends here, and after in Israel, we will gain great victory," and so he turned and left them.

With shouts and cries the men and boys turned westward and left Saul and his eager company making ready for advance.

Ahinoam, Merab and Michal brought the men's armour, and in another hour they were on their westward way. As they went, Merab said to Michal: "Our father enters a valley of roses."

Michal shook her head in protest. "Not all roses. Thorns will pierce the skin and draw the blood."

Ahinoam, who had heard their talk, said: "Your father treads a sacred valley. Greatness is in him—greatness!" She paused. She clasped her hands. "I know not why, but I fear. See yonder cloud in the sky. That is the shadow falling before light comes to high noon."

Jonathan had not heard their talk, but now entering he heard his mother's last words and he said: "The light is with us. We march to victory."

All day they travelled, the women riding on mules and asses, and the men also mounted, and they made their way towards Bezek, in Manasseh, where from Israel and Judah the greatest host ever gathered since the days of Abraham should march to Jabesh. The distance from Bezek to Jabesh was about eighteen miles. The men of Israel and Judah marched through the night, the women with them, and Nahash had taken no care for the safety of his camp.

Before they arrived at Bezek, Samuel, who had travelled from Ramah with his sons Joel and Abiah, and had approved Saul's sending the slain oxen throughout Palestine, joined them. When Saul knew of Samuel's presence he spread his hands and bowing low he said:

"I have roused Israel and Judah. A great army is gathered against the Ammonites. In thy name and mine, O prophet Samuel, have I summoned them."

A look of pride was in Samuel's face—pride in his stalwart being. He touched Saul's beard. "Anointed of God, greatness in kingship shall come to thee. Thy fame shall rise like the hill of Hebron high over all the people."

"Abner is my sarsaba and by Jehovah's help we will destroy these Ammonites."

Samuel circled an arm round the horizon. "There is no light in this camp thou hast gathered, but there is light in the souls of the people, and after the dawn thy troops shall win. The slaughter of the Ammonites shall spread even unto the sea."

"Come and let them see thee. Thou art a prophet, but a warrior also. Thou didst wholly slay the Philistines at Bethcar. In thy name shall I inspire our people."

Throughout the camp they gave inspiration and courage. Abner and his brother Abishai, and Amasa his cousin, and Jonathan were busy all night in organizing the divisions armed with spears and goads and bows and slings, and near to Saul's tent stood Michal.

She looked all round the dim vast camp, and the great assemblage was like shadows of men. She looked at the stars and the moon slightly showing—for it was young—and her heart was moved. She came slowly forward, stood upon a stone and beckoned men to her. In her eyes was the glow of her soul. She felt she must speak. To her it was the break of day for her people. With the excited eyes of men of Judah and Israel on her she said:

"Men of Judah and Israel, we women who may not fight,

have come to see ye triumph over this bad people. We can give the love of our hearts, which is as the juice of the grape and the fruit of the olive to you. You will conquer. Israel and Judah tomorrow will bear witness to my words. The God who was with Abraham at Damascus and in Egypt and with Jacob at Bethel is with us here. We have been slaves, but we are free. Our freedom shall everywhere be sung. The prophet Samuel and my father shall build a temple for the Ark of God to outlast the generations."

Ahinoam, her mother, and Merab were appalled. It was grotesque that a young girl should preach to the people as had Deborah, Miriam and others. These were older and had spoken as prophets, but Michal had had small experience of life; yet the soul of this life was in her veins.

Ahinoam sternly reproved her: "Why dost thou prophesy while the prophet Samuel is here?"

The girl bowed her head. "I am naught, but that which made me speak is vaster than I or all the world. Now I can bear punishment!"

In Ahinoam's face came a great change. She knew Michal had spoken as Jewish women had done since the time of Abraham. "Kneel at my feet," she said.

Michal knelt and bowed her head. Ahinoam stooped, dropped a hand to her cheeks and under her chin and then raised her up gently.

"Daughter, the soul of Israel is in thee. Jehovah gave thee words to speak. Get thee to bed now, beloved."

Trembling with agitation, Michal hurried with Merab to the tent where she would not sleep but would lie dreaming, her soul and body trembling.

Michal's words had been carried from company to company until they came to the ears of Samuel. He touched

Saul frowned. "Michal—why should she prophesy? My well with thee!"

Saul frowned. "Michal—why should she prophesy? My heart is troubled."

"God had spoken through her. Let trouble pass from thy heart. Look round this camp. It is now near midnight. At dawn these hosts will fall on the Ammonites!"

Saul raised his face to the sky, in which was no moon but only the twinkling stars. "I look to heaven above, and the earth trembles beneath my feet. My soul calls to God and my heart is strong."

Samuel touched his beard. "Thy soul and heart belong only to the people and to Jehovah!"

All night long the Hebrew army slept, all night Saul sat before his tent or paced backwards and forwards. At the first glint of dawn, distant, faint, Abner and Jonathan came to him. Saul said: "Abner, we strike now!"

He turned to Jonathan, took his head and kissed it. "Son, thou shalt be with me in this triumph."

At that moment Samuel came. He raised an arm. "The day of Jehovah and Israel is here."

Ten minutes later the hosts of Judah and Israel fell upon the Ammonites. Shrieks and cries resounded through the air; the turmoil of battle raged, and in the forward rush were at last the fleeing Ammonites.

Among the Ammonites who fled was Nahash the King, who tried in vain to stay retreat. Jonathan saw Nahash not far away and he ran through his own troops towards him.

When Nahash saw him coming he turned and faced him. He was tall and strong, and a good fighter, and they were both armed with spears and shields. A sneer was at Nahash's bitter lips. "Son of a dog, thou shalt die a dog's death," and he smote at Jonathan with his spear, but Jonathan skilfully turned it aside. Jonathan said: "Recreant Jew, thou shalt die the death of a recreant," and he drove his spear at Nahash, who deftly avoided it. All the Jews near Jonathan watched and they did not intervene. For many minutes the struggle went on, and then as Nahash drove his spear at Jonathan, Jonathan dropped on a knee and drove his spear into his foe's breast and Nahash fell mortally wounded. All the Jews

shouted their applause. Jonathan stooped over him and said: "Thou prayest for thy people's and for thine own crimes. Thou wouldst have destroyed the Gibeonites but they destroyed thee," and he drove his spear once more into the tyrant's heart, and Nahash lay still.

As far as eye could see the Ammonites flew before Israel and Judah, and all day the flight went on. The victors only ceased when, shaken by fatigue, their wearied limbs could carry them no further. No prisoners were taken for there were no prisons in all the land, and the foe was put to the sword. It was the custom of the time.

Under Saul the capital of the Ammonites, Rabbah, was destroyed and this barbaric people who practised child-sacrifice and death by burning, were wholly defeated. Descended from Ishmael, the son of Abraham, they lived to the East of the Dead Sea and the river Jordan. The first great blow had been struck by Saul at the ancient foes of the Israelites.

Eliab had seen the fight between Jonathan and Nahash. Nethaneel and Shammah had been near Saul throughout the whole of the battle. The fighting of Saul and Jonathan had conquered them all.

Eliab raised his spear, which had slain many Ammonites, and said: "I give my all to the coming king."

Nethaneel did not raise his spear, but he raised his shield as though to protect himself against Eliab. "Thou bear of the Judean hills," he said, "I will kill thee with the jaw-bone of an ass!"

Shammah laughed. "As did Samson! Thou hast a black heart, Nethaneel, but thy deeds are good. I say, 'God save Saul and Jonathan.' "

Nethaneel shrugged a shoulder, and they all joined the triumphant Israelites.

Samuel willed now to give up his judgeship in favour of Saul as King.

Next day he summoned all the people to him at Gilgal,

round which myriad memories clustered. It was a Benjamite sanctuary in the Jordan valley and there the forefathers entered the Promised Land. These pilgrims had passed their first night after the crossing of the river Jordan and there was celebrated the first Passover. Coming with joy, the Israelites felt their need of the present help of Jehovah. Some had protested at the first election of Saul at Mizpeh, but Samuel now proclaimed King Saul amid prayer and sacrifice of peace offerings and general rejoicing.

The Ark of the Covenant had been with the Jews against the Ammonites. It had led the way when they marched into the wilderness, and before they crossed the Jordan. It was with them when they brought down the walls of Jericho under Joshua. Inside it were the two tablets of stone on which the Decalogue was written. It was of immense importance to the Jews having the Ark with them at the battle, and here at Gilgal they fell upon their knees and worshipped it.

Moses had given the carrying and care of the Ark to the Levites and these had borne it in the battle against Nahash. Upon its cover were the Cherubim, and between the wings of the Cherubim the spirit of Jehovah rested. It seemed to many fighting Jews that the spirit of Jehovah had become real, and they saw in it a vision with their excited eyes.

The High Priest, Ahimelech, had been present, and to him Jonathan said: "By the presence of this Ark of the Covenant our victory comes this day."

Ahimelech raised his mitre, on which was a polished golden crown. "Without thee not even the Ark could have conquered Nahash and his Ammonites."

The ephod which the High Priest wore left the middle of the breast uncovered, and on two stones at the shoulder were engraven the names of the sons of Jacob, and over all was a blue vestment to the bottom of which were hung fringes in colour like pomegranates with golden bells that rang as the High Priest moved.

The prophet Samuel came from Ramah with his sons.

He was tall and thin, and having ever been an anchorite, his hair was long and untrimmed and his beard reached almost to his waist and both were white. His large brown eyes had far purpose in them, and despite his advanced years his body was not stooped. It was erect and had that imposing look which ever belongs to greatness. Not form alone, it is the inner life giving dignity to the outer—the soul speaking through the flesh.

As he came towards the Ark he stood still a moment and closed his eyes, and the people who loved him greatly and felt his power, did not applaud, for he was in the presence of the Ark. They only watched him closely. Today he solemnly laid his hands on the shoulders of the High Priest and kissed him on the cheek, then he bowed low before the Ark, which was covered with gold within and without. His unfaithful sons behind him, he put his hands over his eyes, knelt and prayed, and then he turned to Saul, who was approaching with Abner and his staff. Saul bowed before the prophet, who solemnly regarded him. Then Samuel said:

"Come, anointed of Jehovah, and make thy vows here with the sacrifice."

Saul came forward and the light of victory was in his eyes. He bowed low before the Ark and stretched his hands. "My soul, my body and all I am I give to Jehovah."

They burnt a young bullock and a ram with a lamb for a burnt-offering, and they arranged there a thank-offering with the declining sun, and Ahimelech, in his girdle embroidered with flowers of scarlet and purple and blue and fine-twined linen, gave the beautiful service of peace-offering and thank-offering, while Samuel and Saul and all the people took part.

Later, when the sacrifice was ended and the Ark had moved away, borne by the Levites, with the High Priest and the priest following it, the people were gathered together and Samuel came forward. He looked on them with loving eyes. How often had he spoken to them, how had their

excitable natures flown now towards Jehovah, now towards Satanic darkness. They were a people who had the tribal feeling deep in them, and who saw Jehovah only as a tribal God, a God who punished and struck hard when disobeyed, a narrow and inflammatory deity. For long they would be so, and then at last under Jeremiah they broadened, but only with Jonah did they see Jehovah as the God of all the world. Jonah was themselves, Nineveh was Babylon, and the whale was the spirit of Jehovah, and they went at last into captivity at Babylon to learn that God belonged to the universe and not to them alone.

Samuel understood them; he saw far ahead, and he knew that they had much to learn before they were emancipated from the tribal fetters. As he looked out on them now his spirit swept through the vast crowd, and a joyous shout went up, for the people had a King and they had a prophet, and all would be well. Looking out on them he said:

"Children of Israel and Judah, I am old, and soon shall give an account to Jehovah. The day of the Judges is gone, that of the Kings has come. Ye have been given a King and he will lead ye in peace and war. I now resign my office as judge. In the soul of all the people lies the future of our race. I turn to ye now. Whom have I defrauded or oppressed, from whom have I taken ransom to blind mine eyes therewith and to let the guilty escape unpunished? I have walked before all from my youth until this day. Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord! If any complain let him speak now!" Thus he firmly challenged all to charge him with injustice.

With a great shout the people approved. All united in praise of him who had been the greatest of all the prophets and judges since the days of Moses. Hundreds of women dropped on their knees in ecstasy.

When Samuel had finished, at a gesture from the prophet Saul came forward. Somehow the victory had given him a new attitude towards the world. Samuel's announcement,

though he had been prepared for it, stunned him. He suddenly felt himself alone. Could he stay the course? His ancient modesty came once again to him, and he bowed his head humbly. Yet he was the King of Israel and he had had a notable victory. He turned to Samuel and bowed low. His huge body seemed to grow larger as he faced the loudly applauding people.

"I am your servant and shall ever be so. With God's help, I will serve my land, live for it and if need be die for it. Over all is the God of Abraham. He has been with us this day. Yonder passes the Ark of the Covenant."

They followed his gesture with enraptured eyes. "By it we have won. The day of the Jews is now come, and under God the end shall be peace and triumph."

When Saul had finished speaking the people raised a vast shout. Then they began to dance, and dancing was their natural expression of joy. To rejoice and to dance belonged to the Hebrew mind. It was of a primitive, boisterous character—gesticulations, violent leaps and bounds and hopping in a circle. It was, above all, a religious ceremony. Gaiety of feeling, whether of religious or secular nature, found expression in untutored gestures in which the whole body was brought into play. The idea of having æsthetic pleasure from smooth rhythmic movements had no place in the old Hebrew life. They had borrowed none of the forms of the Egyptian dance, which had a measured quiet character.

All danced before Yahwe* to show love and gratitude. Deborah had led the chorus in the triumphal dance and the singing of the victory song. Miriam, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand. The prophets frequently danced to obtain religious exaltation. The two great national holidays, the Abib and the Day of Atonement were marked by religious dancing. On those days the maidens of Israel went forth to the vineyards, each clad in well-washed white, and

* Jehovah.

joined in the choral dance. They all appeared in borrowed gowns so as not to shame the poor.

Jonathan and his younger brothers Melchishua, Ishui and Ishbosheth, and Merab and Michal danced with the people and were warmly cheered. They all danced around Saul and Ahinoam and shouted their joy, and many fell at the feet of Samuel and prayed him to bless them. He raised a hand above them. "The blessing of Jehovah be upon Israel!"

He now came to Saul, put his hands upon his shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks. "Love thy people more than thyself. Remember, thou are naught but Jehovah is all. See that thou remain ever the humble servant of Him whose blessing has been upon us this day."

So saying he turned, and with his sons left the camp and walked towards Ramah.

Greatly moved, Saul watched Samuel pass over the hills and slowly disappear. His eyes grew sombre and his heart sank. It was sunset now and Samuel faded as the sun faded, and he was lost in the last golden haze of evening.

CHAPTER V

THE CRISIS AT GILGAL

SAUL formed the nucleus of a standing army. He willed to free the land from the yoke of the Philistines, but he moved with due caution. He chose a band of valiant warriors who would not only be his bodyguard, but would be the framework of a military system and train the whole nation to arms. He organized three thousand men, keeping two thousand under his own eye and placing one thousand under Jonathan, and all were under Abner with the rest of the forces.

A great valley twelve miles in length curves eastwards and runs to Jericho. About two miles from its head the

valley becomes a narrow gorge with vertical precipices eight hundred feet high. On the south side of this chasm stood Geba on a rocky knoll, with caverns beneath the houses and arable land on the east. Jonathan smote the garrison at Geba sorely and the Philistines fled. But they gathered a great force and pitched in Michmash eastward from Beth-horon. In Michmash, Saul posted his small army, watching the movements of the Philistines should they try to push southwards.

At length the valorous Jonathan, vexed at sight of the great Philistine pillar reared on the hillside as a sign of heathen rule, suddenly demolished the monument, with his father's full consent. Now Saul threw down the gauntlet. The call was sounded throughout the land and the movements of the host in the wilderness were regulated by trumpets.

This roused the Philistines to fury. They made extensive preparations and Saul posted himself at Gilgal, the most sacred spot in all the land, and summoned the people to join him there. They did not come in large numbers, and the Philistines had taken the field with an immense army which he was unable to resist. As Saul, discouraged, retreated from Michmash and Bethel, the Philistines held these posts, and keeping the passes, prevented reinforcements from that side.

Saul, when first anointed, had been warned that the crisis of his life would come at Gilgal. He had been ordered by Samuel to wait seven days for him, and to do nothing till after a religious service was held by Samuel and he was commanded to act. His crisis was here before him, and he failed. He believed the people would not fight unless God's favour had first been got by the offering of sacrifice. So at last he called for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings which had been prepared for Samuel; and by the hand of Ahiah, the priest, grandson of Phineas, son of Eli, he offered the burnt-offering.

Then Samuel came and seeing the smoking altar, he said frowning: "What hast thou done?"

"Because the people were scattered and thou camest not within the days appointed, and the Philistines had gathered

at Michmash, therefore, said I, 'Now will the Philistines come down upon me to Gilgal, and I have not sought the favour of the Lord.' I, therefore, gave the burnt-offering."

Samuel answered sternly: "Thou hast not kept the command of Jehovah." This command had been a test whether the king was a theocratic ruler or a self-willed despot; whether he would take advice from the prophet or be guided by his own will. The working of the two powers, the regal and the prophetic, was on trial. Saul deliberately broke faith.

Samuel sombrely added: "Jehovah will seek another after his own heart."

Saul looked at Samuel with shocked eyes. He thought it was Samuel's anger at not keeping the pledge to wait for him.

"I have sinned in not waiting for thee, but I offered a burnt-offering to Jehovah when thou didst not come within the seven days."

Samuel's reply was grim. "Thou shouldst have waited. Thou didst not sin against me but against Jehovah."

Something of Saul's fatal self-will came into his face. "I have striven for Israel, and I shall still strive. My burnt-offering was given that the Lord of Hosts would be with me in my fighting."

Samuel smiled bitterly. "Can thy small army defeat the Philistines? They come out of their camp in three companies; one turneth to Ophrah, another to Beth-horon, and another to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. They will surround thee. Our people have few swords or spears, for every man of Israel has had to seek the Philistines to sharpen his spear, his coulter, his axe and his mattock. Thou hast force and courage, but since thou wast anointed thou hast set up thine own will, and it cannot prevail. Even thine own people, the Judeans, do not flock to thee."

Saul looked at his few men. "These are naught, but the people will come. I shall face the Philistines with thousands."

Samuel looked at him with gloomy eyes. "At God's com-

mand I brought thee from thy little farm from obscurity to fame. Thou art now King of Israel. Yet thou hast failed. Even the spoil from the defeated Ammonites was seized by the Philistines. The men of Israel have slings and bows and arrows and knives and little else, but without Jehovah's help how shall they prevail against the breastplates, helmets, shields of metal and spears and swords of thy foes!"

Saul's huge body moved heavily from side to side and for a moment he did not speak. Then at last proudly and stubbornly he spoke. "I am King of Israel and so I shall remain. I go from here to Geba, two miles east of Ramah, where thou dost live. At Geba I will be joined by Jonathan with his picked warriors and by Abner who has never failed me."

"Thy self-will destroys thee, Saul. Around thee are valorous people, but thou shalt be rejected. Yet I will go to Geba with thee."

Saul respectfully touched Samuel's shoulder. "Together to Geba, at the head of my troops, and people will flock to thee and me."

Among those who flocked to Saul before they had come to Gilgal were Eliab, Abinadab, Nethaneel and Ozem. Like true Bethlemites they arrived before Saul had offered the burnt-offering and Samuel had condemned him. They belonged to the old rigid Bethlehem type. Difficult though they were they loved technicalities and they knew that Saul had broken faith with Samuel. They watched the sacrifice of the burnt-offering, they saw Samuel sternly condemning Saul, and for Israel's sake it pleased them that Samuel marched towards Geba on his mule with Saul.

Nethaneel shook an angry head: "This day breaks badly."

Ozem, always good-natured, replied: "But will it end gladly."

Eliab swung on him. "Thou art too young to form judgments before thy elders. I am the eldest son of Jesse. I fight not for Saul but for the land I love."

Ozem bowed low. "I fight for the land I love and for King Saul."

Nethaneel turned and spat upon the ground before him. This was an insult. The colour mounted to Ozem's face. "Wipe that out with thy foot or I will fight thee, Nethaneel." His eyes were glowing, his body panted, fury was in his words.

Nethaneel burst out laughing with a snarl. "By Jehovah, thou hast spirit, Ozem. I wipe it out," and with his foot he wiped the spittle out.

Eliab laughed. "Hands all round!" he said, and they clasped hands and stroked each other's cheeks, and then they marched behind Saul and Samuel to Geba.

Saul and Samuel had mounted mules and they travelled to Geba at the head of the troops. People now flocked to Saul, seeing Samuel. Samuel, noting the increase of forces, sadly left Saul and returned to Ramah.

At Geba, Doeg the Edomite, joined the forces of Saul. He was not poor, he owned land at Edom, but he joined Saul because he saw chance for fighting. Also with evil heart he foresaw that Saul in a successful reign would need dark work done for him.

"Who art thou?" said Saul when Doeg came before him.

Doeg bowed low. "I am descended from the kings of Edom. Before Israel had a king, Edom had kings."

"What doest thou here?" Saul gave an inquiring look, for he guessed the soul of the man.

"I come to serve thee, O King, whom God preserve a thousand years. I will be thy faithful servant."

Saul clearly read Doeg's ruthlessness, but that only made him say: "Thou shalt fight against the Philistines, and I will judge when the fighting is done. Go to my sarsaba Abner."

As Doeg went, Saul said to himself: "I need him. He has subtle power, and if today he proves himself, he shall be ever near me."

The Philistines pushed forward from their camp at Mich-

mash to an eminence nearer to Geba. Saul held the northern end of the hill of Geba, having set up his spear, his emblem of command, under a pomegranate tree. Here he watched and waited. Jonathan hated the sight of the insolent foe. He did not tell his father, he asked no counsel of the High Priest, but he took his armour-bearer with him.

"Come," he said, "let us to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be the Lord will work for us."

Jonathan wished some sign. If asked to come on, it would be a sign that the Lord would deliver the foe into their hands. They approached.

"Ho," cried the Philistines, "the skulking Hebrews are coming from their holes." They called to them in derision: "Come up to us and we will show you something."

Jonathan had now his sign. He said to his armour-bearer: "The Lord hath given them into Israel's hands."

Climbing the ascent in the dark, they attacked with darts and slings and spears and stones of the field. Confounded, the Philistines made little resistance, and soon twenty corpses showed the prowess of the two. A panic seized the unbelievers; confusion was increased by the mixture of foreigners in the Philistine army, and they slew each other, and in large numbers fell.

The watchmen of Saul at Geba could see what was forward at Michmash. The crisis called for action. Saul called his men to follow him, and they raised the familiar battle-cry and hurried eagerly to the fight.

They found the foe doing their work for them. Every man's sword was against his neighbour. They were in vast confusion. Some of the serving auxiliaries probably took this chance of turning their arms against their employers. Headlong the heathen fled down the valley past Bethaven, the bleak desert to the east of Bethel. They made no stand there, but turned westward, first to Upper Beth-horon, then down the steep descent to Lower Beth-horon, to gain their own country by the valley of Aijalon. They fled wildly. Thus

the Lord this day saved His people from the hands of their foes.

Saul, wishing that naught might hinder the pursuit, had, before they started at Michmash, foolishly made his people swear to eat naught until the evening, and agree to slay anyone who should cease from slaughter until night. Jonathan was not present then, so he picked up a honeycomb with the point of the spear he carried, and ate it. The effect of even this slight nourishment was marked on his tired frame. The dimness of sight caused by hunger passed away and he pushed harder the pursuit.

Jonathan said to his friends: "Because I ate this honey see how my sight and strength are greater. If people had eaten freely today, there had been greater slaughter of our foes."

When the day was done and the Philistines fled, in their ravenous hunger the people now sinned against custom. They slew and ate sheep, oxen and calves of the Philistines, and did not wait for them to be drained but ate them with the blood. Some of the rigorous Levites with the expedition told Saul, and Saul willed that the law should be obeyed. "Ye have dealt ill." To the High Priest he added: "Seek Jehovah's will in this."

There was no reply from Jehovah. Saul thought this was due to some offence in the army. Incensed, he spoke. "As the Lord liveth, the sinner shall surely die." Horror-stricken, the people answered him not.

After the usual custom the lot was cast, and in the casting the people escaped but Saul and Jonathan were left. Saul and Jonathan stood on one side, and at length Jonathan was shown to be the offender against Saul's command. He came forward firmly and said to Saul: "I did certainly taste a little honey, and lo I must die, my father. I ask not to be spared. Sweet is it to suffer death to satisfy my oath, for it is my comfort to leave our people conquerors."

Saul sternly left him no hope. "God do so and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."

But the people intervened. They firmly cried: "As the Lord liveth, not one hair of Jonathan shall fall to the ground; he hath wrought with God this day!"

Saul struggled with himself, and retired to his tent for thought, but at last he saved Jonathan from death.

Meanwhile there had come to Saul's tent Ahinoam and Merab and Michal, and from the hills they had seen the fight. They praised Saul for forgiving Jonathan, and Michal drew Jonathan's head to her and kissed his cheek. They saw the fleeing Amalekites, and Ahinoam said to Jonathan:

"My son, thou hast fought well today, and thy father adds honour to his name."

Jonathan shook his head in protest: "All victory is from Jehovah. See how the Philistines flee! The sword of Joshua is with us. He was the father of the sword and spear—and now we can sharpen our own weapons and need not go to the Philistines!"*

Then Saul came among them and they bowed low before him. He embraced Ahinoam and laid his hand on the heads of Merab and Michal.

Saul looked over his troops. He saw Doeg the Edomite near the staff of Abner whom he called and praised greatly.

Abner said: "Thy spear is high as Mount Sinai, O King. See how they flee!"

Saul sent Melchishua for Doeg. When Doeg came Saul said: "Thine arm is strong, Doeg. Thou shalt stay with me ever."

Doeg, the heavy-browed and furtive, bowed low, then straightened himself. "I will serve thee, O King, until thy day or mine be done."

Then he pointed. "My little daughter with her nurse, my sister Sherah. They have seen the battle from the hills!"

Sherah had followed Doeg, her brother, to the camp at Geba. With glowing eyes she saw the defeat of the Philis-

* The Jews were obliged to bring to the Philistines all their weapons to be mended and sharpened.

tines, but she was suddenly roused to anxiety by feeling Ruth's face buried in her robe and by a cry from the frightened child.

Ruth with startled eyes had seen the fighting too, and she had turned pale and grown rigid, and at last unable to bear seeing men killed she flung herself round with her back to the fighting and her face in Sherah's robe.

Sherah stooped, and drew her close; she kissed her head, put her arms around her and sat upon the ground and quieted her. At last, when the killing had ceased near Saul's tent, they moved to where Doeg stood with Abner.

Now they all saw the girl approaching. They liked the face of the child, so different from that of Doeg, and Saul said: "The child's name?"

"My daughter's name is Ruth."

Ahinoam stooped and kissed Ruth, and Sherah, Doeg's sister, made obeisance to the three women, and Michal drew Ruth to her.

Some time after Jonathan's defeat of the Philistines, Samuel came from Ramah to Saul and he said: "Go, smite Amalek and destroy all they have. Spare them not, but slay men and women, infant and suckling, oxen and sheep, camel and ass."

Saul gathered a large army, came to the capital of Amalek and laid wait in the valley, and at length the Amalekites rallied to fight. The clash of the two armies was great, and Saul and the people of Israel smote the Amalekites from Havilah unto Shur, and at length he captured Agag, the King of the Amalekites, alive. He fiercely destroyed the Amalekites, but he and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen, fatlings and the lambs.

Then Samuel, under Jehovah's command, came to Saul, who said: "Blessed be thou! I have obeyed the order of the Lord."

"If thou hast obeyed, what means this bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen?"

Samuel would not heed Saul's feverish excuses. "Wherefore, then, didst thou not obey the Lord's voice, but in thy greed and self-will didst fly upon the spoil, and do evil?"

Saul stiffened stubbornly. "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. True, the people spared much. They chose the best of the spoil which otherwise would have been wasted. I have saved none but the King of Amalek, who shall stand here before you."

The prophet spoke sharply. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings as in obeying His voice? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry."

Saul, startled, said falteringly now: "I have sinned against Jehovah's commandment and thy word." He had no real sorrow for the sin, only for its results. "I pray thee, pardon my sin and turn again with me that I may worship the Lord."

"I will not return with thee." He turned to leave, but Saul in despair and dementia seized the border of his upper robe, holding him by its collar, and it tore under his grasp. Looking at the torn collar, Samuel spoke sadly: "The Lord shall rend the Kingdom from thee!"

Then Samuel demanded Agag, King of the Amalekites. Agag was brought, fettered, and he said to Saul: "Surely the bitterness of death is past."

But Samuel sternly said: "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women," and he seized Jonathan's sword and hewed Agag in pieces before Saul and all his family and the people of Israel. The people blinded their eyes, and Saul's household wept.

Having thus vindicated Jehovah's rights, Samuel returned to Ramah. Nevermore did he come to Saul. Yet he could not forget the King. He had loved him for his early promise,

for his high and noble qualities, for his brave services; and he mourned his fall.

Eliab and his brothers who had listened to Saul and Samuel, watched Samuel leave for Ramah with Joel and Abiah, his sons, and Eliab said: "Yonder goes the greatest judge since Moses. Yonder passes the judgeship of Israel, but the prophet remains." His eyes took on a distant look. "I see great things done for Israel by Saul and Jonathan his son."

Nethaneel frowning said: "And I see black things done for Israel by Doeg of the Edomites. That dog, that son of Edom! The Edomites denied our people drink when they came first to the Holy Land, and now the son of Edom is near to Saul the King. I see black days for Israel!"

Shammah shrugged a shoulder. "Between the black and white there is safety for Israel," he said.

CHAPTER VI

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS

IT was a day in June and there came riding in the hills outside Bethlehem a Jew of handsome face and proud carriage. He was followed by about fifty others of distinctive bearing. The leader halted his mule when the roofs of Bethlehem came into view not more than a mile away. Through the fir trees they could see crowds in the streets, and there were the signs and the show of summer-bright flowers, birds of song and animals of the woods darting hither and thither, peering fearfully at these strangers. Overhead the sun was shining brightly, and the valley below Bethlehem was gorgeous in colour and ample in orchards of fruit, and citrons, dates, figs and pomegranates grew everywhere. This was the province of Judah, where the people were in sections turbulent and disorderly, where some were almost heathen,

and women wove hangings for the Ashtera image of Ashtaroth.

The leader was the sarsaba or general commanding the army of King Saul, and at his side was the sar or commander of the Gibborim, the most powerful soldiers Israel ever had. The sarsaba Abner dismounted and said to the sar and the others: "I go into Bethlehem alone. They know not my face there and I shall study the minds of the people. All is not well under Saul today, but all *shall* be well, as was Jehovah's command. Dismount and rest and eat."

He even waved back the sar who would have joined him. "No, alone I go. With my own eyes I shall see, and hear with mine own ears, and shall report to King Saul."

He shook his head mournfully. "We have a King, but the Philistines are over us. They are better trained, better armed than we, and Saul is a vassal of the Philistines. The Philistines prevail—but how long, is in the hands of Him who guided Abraham, Moses and all the prophets until now."

The fifty men showed impatience, but with a stern gesture the sarsaba reproved them. "All shall yet be well," he said. Simply dressed, with no signs of great command upon him, he walked swiftly up towards Bethlehem. He carried no weapons save one hidden under his robe at the waist. He passed only one peasant, humbly clad, who watched him ascend the hill with doubt in his eyes. Abner had presence, that dominating thing more than speech, which talks silently of power. No great man or woman, no great actor or actress ever entered among fellow-citizens but the thrill of their presence, however slight, was felt. The great exude an atmosphere belonging to greatness, and the higher the man, the more powerful the aura. What was in Abner was increased in Saul, and that in Saul was to be in a vaster degree still in another who would rule Israel.

As he neared Bethlehem the murmur of the people, the animals and the life came, and he lifted his dark head and shook it with a friendly smile. He was a great warrior; he

was almost, but not quite, a great man. He was to live long and serve Saul and his successor, but now he had a patriotic duty, to find the truth about Bethlehem, if possible.

As Abner, who had commanded many thousands of men, entered the town, there came from the other end one who was to play a part in the future of Bethlehem, greater for the moment than any in it, because he had the gift of prophecy. He was of the prophet's school at Ramah, where Samuel lived. He had been inspired by the teachings of Samuel, and no one knowing, he started for Bethlehem, inflamed as he was by righteous faith, into a semi-hysteria, characteristic of that time and of all times in the world. Before he entered the place he thrust up his hands in prayer, then moved forward and began to sing.

He was about twenty-five years of age, with black flowing hair, shining dark eyes and a reckless abandon of manner. He waved his hands above his head and was seemingly blind to the people about him, but there was in him the agony of prophecy. The crowd made way and were startled. His name was Hezro. He sang loudly:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be raised up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

He was for the moment attractive, yet abhorrent—attractive because his prophecy or apostrophe was the inner cry of their hearts, but abhorrent because of this bold desire of the soul. For Saul was vassal to the Philistines, and there were Philistines in Bethlehem that day, and people shrank from the possible effect upon the young men and upon themselves.

Abner swiftly approached the centre of the town, and with a patriotic heart he secretly approved of Hezro's chant, but his face showed naught save wonder, and his eyes a stern anxiety. Saul was the King of Israel, but he was not the "King of Glory."

Two Philistine soldiers, roused by the chanted appeal, moved to arrest the man. Meanwhile, the people, dressed

in linen robes with the simlah of brown or white wool bordered by blue and finished off with heavy tassels, and with a thin headcloth fastened by a cord over hair worn long, showed anxiety. They feared punishment for this dangerous appeal to the ancient spirit of Deborah and Samson and the judges and prophets of the past.

Moving among the people was a woman in a gay-coloured tunic, with a veil falling over her shoulder and a nose-jewel with gold chain and girdle and a brilliant necklace, and with her was a child of three years of age whom she led by the hand. The child was Bathsheba, who was in the coming years to play so vast a part in David's life. She now listened to the young Jew with bewildered yet perceptive eyes. She was a pretty, alluring child, and her mother was beautiful, and when the two Philistine soldiers started forward, she pulled at her mother's skirt and was lifted up that she might see.

Through the Judeans there swept a quivering emotion. It was like the start of a storm at sea when the sun begins to darken and a ripple comes on the face of the waters; yet none stepped forward to warn the man—that would identify them indirectly with his daring appeal to the ancient spirit. "The King of Glory"—that was the Messiah, He who should redeem Israel and save her from her foes. The colours of the garments they wore under the brave sun were in bright disturbance, and turbanned heads and flowing veils shook with fear. Even upon the roofs of the houses and from the lattices of woodwork of the upper chambers troubled faces looked out.

Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Japheth, Eli and Samuel were all generals, priests or prophets, and the days of the earlier generals, priests and prophets waked again in Bethlehem. The call of Hezro was stimulating them, but they had wholesome fear of the strange mad attack and appeal.

The Philistines controlled the coast. So far they had

greater fighting power than the people of Judah or Israel, and they had chariots, and the people of Judah and Israel were only now acquiring them. In the open field and on the level the Philistines were often triumphant. Caravans of asses, mules, oxen and camels laden with meal, figs, dates, raisins, citrons, wine and oil were passing through Bethlehem on this day. The Philistines had set up military posts in the heart of the country and they had dared to set up one at Bethlehem in spite of Saul.

The people were now trading in the streets in household utensils of metal and earthenware, wheat, meal, parched corn, lentils, beans, peas, and other vegetables, and honey and butter. Here and there were sold harps and timbrels and cornets and cymbals. There could be seen rising from the roofs heads of sleeping people startled by the song of Hezro, and here and there a tabret or a tambourine or a flute or a harp made occasional music.

An old Jewish priest with a powerful voice called aloud from among the people: "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*"

He was almost blind, his beard was white, and he spoke with rabid fervour; but the voice of Hezro rang louder for the gates to be lifted up, the everlasting doors to be raised, that the King of Glory might come in!

People gathered round the old priest nodding assent, but the chant of Hezro moved their hearts the other way. They could not feel Hezro should perish like the ungodly and yet they could not be sure. They had tired of the judges and had clamoured for a king, and Saul had come; but Saul had proved a partial failure and was not even redeemed by Jonathan his son. Abner the sarsaba felt the unquiet and the spirit of discontent. Between the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites and the Moabites on the eastern bank of the

Jordan, the Jews could be crushed like corn between the millstones.

The time of the judges had been called the heroic age of the Hebrew nation, but there had arisen in the Israelite mind a consciousness absent from that of heathen peoples. The judges were not models of righteousness. In their day the lamp of God burned low and dim and there was no open vision. Stirring in the minds of the people was the spirit of monarchy and Saul was the king, but he had lost caste and the people of Judah were troubled. So far the Philistines had been masters of the Jews, but the day of the Bethlemite was now to come.

Near to Bethlehem lived Jesse of the tribe of Benjamin. David, the youngest, tended his father's sheep. In his veins there ran the blood of the righteous and the unrighteous, of the great and of the humble, of Rahab the wanton who had saved the Jews when they first entered the Promised Land, and of Ruth the Moabite whom Boaz married after she had obeyed Naomi, her mother-in-law, and had gone to his bed at midnight. Ruth had married Boaz, and she gave him a son called Obed, the father of Jesse.

The two Philistine soldiers approached Hezro, but Abner intervened. "The man is mad. He does not understand the chant falling from his lips. His eyes see, yet see not. He is not sane; let him alone."

The man, Hezro, understood. He had courage, but he would not insist on his sanity. A flash of the eye to Abner and he increased his eccentric song until it was carried from mouth to mouth throughout the place. The armed Philistine soldiers hesitated and Abner further intervened. He stood between Hezro, who was moving towards the outskirts of the town, and the Philistines. "I am Abner, sarsaba of the army of King Saul. Let my word prevail."

Few people in Bethlehem knew Abner by sight, and they gathered amazed; and the Philistine soldiers withdrew, after murmuring salutation. When they had gone Abner frowned

upon the people. "I have saved your town this day, yet the King will deal with this."

He turned and looked after the disappearing Hezro. "Before God now, I wonder, I wonder!" he said.

CHAPTER VII

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

WHEN Abner had gone, Samuel the prophet of Ramah, with flowing hair and beard, appeared in Bethlehem, with a long horn filled with sacred oil and the elements of sacrifice.

After the incident of Hezro, to the people of Bethlehem the coming of Samuel seemed miraculous. It filled them with forboding, however. Samuel, seeing their faces, quieted them by saying he meant to sacrifice. In not large numbers they followed at a distance, still apprehensive, still curious.

When Samuel came to Jesse's house he was received warmly at the door by Jesse and he said: "I bring the heifer, the goat, the ram, the turtle-dove and the pigeon for sacrifice. These I shall leave without in charge of those with me."

Samuel laid the horn upon the table, and he said to Jesse: "Your sons, bring them."

The sons came. They seemed to him unfit for the anointing, though he was impressed by Eliab. His soul was troubled, for Jehovah had commanded him to anoint a son of Jesse.

"Have you no other sons?"

"One other, the youngest, tending sheep in the hills."

"I will not eat till I have seen this boy."

To the disgust of Jesse's other sons David was sent for, and meanwhile Samuel prepared the sacrifice, attended by his two sons, Joel and Abiah.

The people of Bethlehem gathered to the sacrifice and there was the hum of excitement in the town. Every house

was a centre of gossip and priests moved among them, sedate, yet intriguing and disturbing. Upon the hillside, apparent to the people of the town, was Jesse's house, and all eyes turned thither.

At length David came lightly running towards his father's house, his kinnor in his arm, his dark hair blowing in the wind, his eyes alight with the fervour of the high hills and the life of nature he had led. He was a being apart. All men who come to great heights carry with them the air of the dreamer, though they may be men of action. David was a dreamer, but his body was that of a warrior and his feet were like the hind's feet upon the ground and his face was ruddy. He had seen the sacrifice made ready and had bowed his head reverently, then had gone into the house. On his entrance Samuel said in his heart: "The future King of Israel!"

"What is your name?"

"My name is David, son of Jesse."

Samuel smiled. "David—the meaning is Beloved!"

David had a beautiful voice. It had sweet resonance and a distant and remote note like the call of a bird far off in the hills. His voice was the most eloquent part of him save his eyes. In them were hope, power, tragedy, comedy, glory. In his voice was all that and one thing more—the thrilling vibrations of one of the greatest rulers the world has known.

Samuel looked round the room at Jesse and his sons and womenfolk. "Put down your harp."

David was not as stalwart as Eliab, the eldest brother, but there was that in him which could overcome Eliab and all his brothers. In David's veins past good and evil flowed. He would do dark things, but the good would overcome the bad, and repentance and love of Jehovah would ever be in his soul.

There entered into David's heart the glimmer of that immortality of which the Jews were not yet wholly convinced. They had Sheol, they had Gehenna, they had Satan—

but it was all dim! In Jehovah they trusted, but they had no clear hope of life after death.

It is hard to feel in direct relation with that crude, partly civilized people who savagely mutilated their enemies and destroyed by barbarous methods—by saws and hammers and burning and other harsh things. Yet they were the chosen folk of Jehovah and were in essence great. We must not think of them in the spirit of today. We do not now think in the spirit of a hundred and twenty years ago when men were hanged for stealing a sheep or a loaf of bread, and the recalcitrant sailor was flogged through the fleet from ship to ship. That was two brief lifetimes ago, but let the mind go back to the time of Saul and David. Human life was then held cheap and rivers of blood were not only in the imagination. Even Samuel had slain many men with his own hand, but Samuel was in the light of his day a great, good and just man. All the prophets had been generals and soldiers.

The room grew silent when Samuel, with his horn of sacred oil, bade David kneel. Then he anointed him, saying naught save in his heart, "David, thou shalt be King of Israel."

When David rose, Samuel took him by the hand and outside they knelt before the sacrifice. Blood and death were the symbols of faith in Jehovah. Blood and death were the insignia of all nations until Christ was born in Bethlehem; and blood and death have from that day to this been the signs of strife between the evil and the good, the tyrannous and the obedient, the beautiful and the ugly, the lovely and the licentious—the everlasting struggle.

While Samuel and David and Jesse and his kinsfolk were reverent and absorbed and moved as in a dream, the brothers of David talked together.

Eliab, the brawny, the malicious, the jealous, the eldest, said to his brothers: "This insults us. We are the elder, we have knowledge of life. We have done things. This boy

has only tended sheep upon the hills. He is the featherweight of the family."

Abinadab said: "Samuel has anointed the babe of our flock—no more than this tassel of my robe."

And Shammah: "Eliab's name is known as a fighter, a man of merit and power. Why should he be passed by?"

Nethaneel, the low-browed, small-eyed, evil figure, the father of Leah, snarled: "We must find a way to stop it all."

But Ozem said: "He that does ill to the anointed does ill to himself," and Raddai added: "He that does ill to himself in such a way does ill to all his people."

Then Eliab spoke again. "Let us wait; with us shall be victory in the end."

Miriam and Leah, daughters of Nethaneel, and the daughters of Eliab and Shammah and others entered when David was anointed, and they watched it all with staring eyes.

When Leah saw the anointing and heard what her father and her uncles said, after Eliab had spoken she indignantly said: "Victory shall be with Uncle David!"

Her father frowned. "Thou art as yet a babe! Thy tongue is like the flying serpent!"

"The flying serpent is a dream," Leah answered.

Ozem, ever kind-hearted, caught her hand and said: "But thy dream stings, Leah." They all frowned and turned from her.

"I love ye all," Leah said softly.

Yet all this time David looked on Samuel and his father's and his mother's faces with a new spirit in him, and then he turned to his brothers and read hatred in most of their faces. He held a hand to each. Without a word they shook it and one or two mumbled in their beards. The worst of the mumblers was Nethaneel, and he tried to injure David's hand by the strength of his grip, but he found that David's grip was stronger still, though but a boy of seventeen. He had been trained on the hills and in the open air, and David's dark blue eyes looked fearlessly into the crooked small eyes

of his brother. They said plainly: "My life is on the high hills with Jehovah."

Samuel, standing by and watching all, had heard the talk of David's brothers, said: "Thy time will come. Be at peace on the high hills with they sheep and thy harp, with thy sling and staff, and Israel shall give thee the greater day."

Jesse, the head of the family, came forward, his fine face shining, his dark eyes glimpsing the shadowy future. He took David's head in his hands and kissed it. Then David's mother Judith came, with her dark hair, olive skin, and she kissed him on each cheek.

"Beloved—beloved!" she said. Then she closed her eyes and tears stole down her cheeks. Her daughters Zeruiah and Abigail sought to comfort her, but she said: "My heart is not bowed down but lifted up. My tears are of joy."

There never was a more simple dramatic scene. The room was large. The colours of their robes, their turbans, their sandled feet, the beards of the men, the sturdy, self-reliant manner, the beauty of the women in their tunics, mantles and headdresses gave distinction to the scene. Zeruiah, who was married to Zuri and begat Joab, Abishai and Asahel, said to her mother: "Listen! The people are singing."

The people of Bethlehem, who had drawn near to the sacrifice, were singing the song of Deborah:

"The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel.

"Awake, awake, Deborah. Awake, awake, utter a song. Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Ahinoam.

"So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

The spirit of it all had entered into the people, and the singing of Hezro and the day's events had filled them with shuddering hope. These had been to all, though they knew it not, like the rainbow with the treasure at the foot. The

light of the sun Joshua stopped gave glory to this land to which the eyes of the whole world would turn at last. Empires might pass, but David's empire would never pass.

At the door of Jesse's house Samuel touched David on the shoulder. "Before thou goest to the hills, come to Ramah, and for three days learn truth as we teach it there."

David looked toward his father, and Jesse nodded. A few moments later, through the streets of the town of Bethlehem passed the two, moving quickly, David with the light of a new life in his eyes. The sons of Samuel followed, and as the shadow of the evening fell they reached Naioth, the home of the prophets at Ramah.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SONS OF SAMUEL

AT Naioth of Ramah, the residence of the prophets under Samuel, David remained three days before he returned to the hills. Among the elder students were Nathan and Gad, who later became David's prophet and seer, nearer to him than most others in the religious world, and Ahimelech and his youngest son Abiathar, the celebrated singers Heman, Asaph and Ethan and many others. All, numbering about eighty, were studying the doctrines of Jewish faith and the customs of the priests.

Samuel's two sons were older than David, and a half-hour after his entrance into Ramah, Joel said to David: "These are bad days with the Philistines so powerful, and since Saul's decline—so hopeless. Woe, woe, Israel!"

With furtive eye he thus spoke to try David. David was not deceived. A natural genius, his inner sight had become clearer since his anointing. "Jehovah will save us whether by Saul or another."

Instantly Joel picked up the two last words: "Or another?"

An umbrageous smile came to his thick lips. "And who might that other be?"

David shook his head. "In this centre of Jewish faith we shall trust. Jehovah knows."

Joel looked round the room where were men of ages from eighteen to sixty, all dressed in long robes, some turbaned, some bare-headed, but all with the spirit of this sacred place.

"Yes, belief is the soul of Israel, and here at Naioth we have been sedately taught. Purity of purpose is with each step we take."

David's eye flashed, his head raised. "But I see not the purity and steadiness of your step," he said, and the irony was quiet but forceful.

Joel saw David with malicious eyes, for here was a new anointed figure in the Jewish world, and jealousy and bitterness ate at his heart. He loathed David and David knew it, for he, more than all, had the divination of primitive people. It is higher than intellect or intelligence. It is behind all, what from the beginning of time has most affected the destiny of men.

"Perhaps Abiah can give you a better answer," Joel said, and beckoned to his brother. Abiah was fair and Joel dark. He was a little better than his brother, and he was slim and well built. He had an outdoor look, somehow of the hills, while Joel's look was of the shaded valley.

"This David of Bethlehem likes not my answers, Abiah. Speak thy mind to him."

Abiah's bright blue eyes glanced sharply at his brother. "How shall I answer questions I have never heard?"

"I will not ask a question," said David. His eye lighted, his face slightly flushed. He put a hand on Abiah's arm. "The days of Jewish life grow brighter, the hopes of our people deeper. We who have been slaves in Egypt and elsewhere are now almost free. We have ceased our wanderings. The days of Moses and Deborah and Barak and Joshua and all the prophets have proved Jehovah with us."

He paused, then raised his eyes, and with a mystic look repeated Hezro's words:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be raised up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

Abiah, dismayed by the dignity and fervour of David's words, laughed a little. "And who is the King of Glory?"

David's face took on that look of faith and resolution which were ever to mark the great passages of a great life. "Is there a Jew who does not know that the King of Glory is the Messiah, the Son of God, that will come?"

He took Abiah's wrists. "Abiah, thou art the son of the greatest prophet since Moses. The hour of Israel is near. Hezro was not mad. He was trained in this school. In him was the vision your father has taught here. He is a step ahead of us all. While Israel and her life go on, so will Hezro's words. Hezro is Ramah and Bethlehem and Israel in one."

Even these two were overcome by David, who with his ruddy face, black hair and shining eyes, was the epitome of Israel. At that moment Charah, the mother of the two, entered and walked slowly forward. She was tall, steady-faced, comely and benign, yet she had the uncertainty of life and conduct of her sons. Their ill qualities had not come from Samuel but from this woman, not wholly true, not bad, yet not wholly good.

With sudden impulse of Jewish patriotism she said: "I heard your words, David, and Jah* knows they are good. This place is nearer to heaven than all the world. It is in Jehovah's keeping. Thou hast been in the hills with the harp now in thy hand. Sing us a psalm here at Naioth."

At her entrance David had picked up his harp and he looked round the room. The spirit of a chant was in him, and with the light of divine vision in his eyes, he was ready. He bowed his head. How often had he in his tent or cave on the hills left his harp where the wind could play on it,

* Jehovah.

and as the wind caught the strings he had risen and hummed psalms till the morning. In the light of the stars, in the shimmer of the moon, in the clouds and the rain, even in the hoar frost, the soul of the life he was to lead in Judah and Israel came to him. He was ever near to God, and in days to come when his sword would smite and he would punish hard by axes and by hammer and by saws and would grind the foes of Israel hard, and he would sin sorely; yet he would be near to Jehovah, whose will he would ever seek, and he would be the man "after God's own heart." Saul had been always a soldier and little more. He conquered Israel's foes, but he forgot the people's good; justice and truth were not in his soul. David would ever be the appealing and obedient son of Jehovah.

Charah led David to a platform from which Samuel often spoke, and where there were two benches. At that moment Samuel entered. He motioned David to a seat, then turning to his sons, said: "Bring hither the choir."

After a moment as the choir came quickly forward, Samuel added:

"At David's gesture the choir will join."

Thirty men led by Heman, Asaph and Ethan came forward. All faces were now turned toward David. The only woman in the room was Charah. Her eyes were fixed gently upon David, for from first to last in his life he had always immense influence upon everyone. Charm, dignity, beauty of face, with an exquisite voice and the power of presence, he looked gently on the eighty people, then slowly seated himself.

The room became quiet, then so still that not a sound met the ear, and at last David raised his head and sang:

"Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?

"The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying:

" 'Let us break their bonds asunder and cast away their cords from us.'

"Then shall the Lord speak unto them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure.

"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

"I will declare the decree; the Lord hath said unto me: 'Thou art my son; this day have I forgotten thee.

" 'Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

" 'Blessed are they that put their trust in me.

" 'For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous but the way of the ungodly shall perish.' "

David raised a hand and the choir joined in, beginning at the words, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," and they sang with him to the end.

When the singing ceased some were in tears. Singers they were but they had never heard a chant like this. There had been many strong men in Israel—King Saul had been one of them, and before him Abraham and Moses and Joshua and Eli and others. There had been legend and seers and prophets and dreams and visions. But here was a shepherd boy from Bethlehem with the inspiration of the high hills in his body, in his firm and wonderful hands, his aspiring face and above all in his gravely searching voice.

They began to crowd round him, but Samuel stretched a hand. "Enough, let us pray."

In the prayer was vision of larger days. When they rose, Nathan and Gad and Ahimelech and Abaithar came forward, all young, but all save Abaithar older than David, and Ahimelech much older. They looked into David's eyes. He clasped their hands one by one, and Nathan said: "While life lasts I will remember thee."

And Gad said: "While time is to me, my service is thine."

Ahimelech said: "Son of Jesse, I shall keep thee in my

mind for ever." Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, added: "I remain thy friend always."

"I give myself to the service of us all, one more of the many and one not less than the many, for in my heart is the love of the God of our fathers." So David spoke firmly.

There was silence. Samuel stretched an arm and said sacredly: "Before Abraham was, I am, saith the Lord of Hosts."

An hour later, Nathan, Gad, Ahimelech and Abiathar sat in tender talk, and nearby watching them, with friendly yet troubled eyes, were Joel and Abiah. In his room the prophet Samuel prayed unto the Lord, while his wife with loving eyes stood watching him.

Naioth of Ramah was this day taking on new life, new faith and hope. Its red walls shone in the morning sun, shimmered in the moon, and its flat roofs bore the bodies of those who for love of Judah and Israel had come to train themselves for service in this land, which was to be the centre of the world's civilization, the home of eternal faith. The Jews had not the art of sculpture or painting, but they had sublime music and the soul of far-off things. Egypt had art and Assyria had art, but Israel had that which would outlast Egypt and Assyria and all the empires of the world. Its people might be scattered among all the nations on earth, but He who would live at Nazareth in Galilee, the descendant of David, would conquer in the end, if not all nations direct, then the spirit of all nations of the world. As it is written: "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root."

Down in the town of Bethlehem the little child Bathsheba lay asleep beside her mother, and she waked and dimly recalled Hezro and the chant he sang:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be raised up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

CHAPTER IX

DAVID AND GOLIATH

FOR forty days the armies of Israel under Saul faced the Philistine army not far from Jerusalem. The army of the Philistines was greater than that of Saul, and Saul had a mood of bitterness and despair. Neither his family nor Abner, his sarsaba, nor his compliant tool, Doeg the Edomite, could lift him from depression. He was the victim of dementia.

They were at a place called Shochoh, which had been called "The Boundary of Blood." The armies of the Philistines were in the valley of Elah and they were on one side of the mountain and Israel on the other, and there was a valley between. Here gloomily viewing the Philistine hosts, Saul said fiercely to his family: "Jehovah hath deserted us. For forty days we have listened to the taunts flung by Goliath, who challenges anyone to fight him. We have none that dares meet him."

Ahinoam boldly spoke: "God hath not deserted us, but thou hast failed him, Saul."

In anger Saul got to his feet. "I have conquered the Ammonites, the Amalekites and surrounding nations, but I am still vassal to the Philistines. In the open they fight better than we and they are better armed. Their King commands a greater army, while the men of Israel and Judah come not to me as once they came."

Michal came forward. "I prophesied for thee when thou didst fight the Ammonites. I said then: 'God who was with Abraham at Damascus and in Egypt is with us now.' The prophet Samuel blessed my words."

Saul came slowly to her. "Thou hast the prophet's soul; prophesy now."

Ahinoam stretched a hand as though to stay her, but Michal, standing a moment speechless, raised her eyes and said loudly: "This shall be a great day for Israel. Jehovah is with us

still. Behind the clouds the sun is shining. One cometh that shall conquer Goliath, and Israel shall be glad."

Jonathan only spoke: "The truth in thy blood hath spoken, Michal. Thou art the youngest, but yet the eldest of us all. Thy heart is the heart of Deborah. She saved Israel and thou dost save her too."

The face of Saul underwent a great change. Hope came into it and he stooped and kissed Michal on both cheeks. "Daughter of my heart!" he said.

Saul looked upon his troops somehow with new eyes. There was little cheerfulness among them and great depression. They realized that the Philistines, better armed, more surely disciplined, and with the giant Goliath, had them against the wall. They turned and looked towards Saul's tent, depression in their faces, anger in their souls. Even Abner, the great sarsaba, in whom they trusted more than in the King, could not rouse them from despair.

They stood and watched Goliath, nearly ten feet high, come out upon the hill and challenge all the host. His armour was a helmet of bronze and copper, covering the head and nape but leaving the face wholly exposed, his body was defended by a coat of mail made of enormous weight—almost two hundredweight—which made him unwieldy and slow in movement. The corselet descended to the knees and there met greaves of copper fastened by clasps or thongs around the calf and ankle. His huge shield, large enough to protect the whole body, formed of hide stretched on a wooden frame bordered by metal, was borne by an attendant. He carried a spear with a handle like a weaver's beam, the spear's head weighing eighteen pounds. He had a sword at his side and a javelin hung across his shoulders. Day after day he had challenged the armies of Saul.

Jonathan would have gone against Goliath because he had sterling courage and power, but he had been ordered by Samuel not to do so. His brow lowered, however, and he chafed inwardly.

Over the hills from Bethlehem came David, and when he saw the armies of the Jews and of the Philistines his eyes lighted. He had the soul of a warrior and the heart of a poet and mystic. His footsteps quickened and he made his way through the Jewish army towards his brothers' division. He brought parched corn and loaves of bread for his three brothers in the camp, together with ten slices of dried curd from the farm for the captain of his brothers' division, and he gave the food to his brothers and their captain.

When David heard Goliath's challenge, his spirit rose in anger. He cried out to all that he would fight Goliath. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that defies the armies of the living God?"

Many Jews heard his words and they marvelled at his primitive form and natural boldness. He was not tall, but he had ever a commanding presence, and those near admired him and cheered his words.

When Eliab, his eldest brother, first saw him, he said maliciously: "Why camest thou hither? With whom has thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thine heart. Thou hast come to see the battle!"

David said: "I came to bring thee and thy captain food. Why does no one fight Goliath? Can there be a battle till he is slain?"

Shammah, another brother spoke sneeringly. "Can a shepherd boy fight a giant so mightily armed? Wilt thou fight him with thy harp?"

David's eyes blazed. "Not with my harp will I bring him to the dust. He shall die this day, and I shall live."

David's words were carried to Saul by his sarsaba, Abner. Saul said: "Bring the young man to me."

Saul scanned David's upright figure. "Whose son art thou, young man?"

David answered: "I am the son of thy servant Jesse, the Bethlemite."

"Wilt thou repeat thy words about Goliath?"

To Saul David repeated his words concerning the uncircumcised and added: "Let no man's heart fail—thy servant will fight this Philistine."

Saul's heart took courage and he eagerly said: "Thou hast not stature or strength for such a fight. Thou art young and lean. Thy handsomeness is no weapon."

"Thy servant kept his father's sheep in the hills and there came a lion and a bear and took lambs out of the flock. I went after them; I caught them by their beards and slew them. This Philistine shall be as one of them. The Lord hath delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the jaw of the bear—he will save me from this Philistine."

"The Lord be with thee!" said the King. Then, with his own hands he armed David, his family watching him with eager faith. Michal's heart went out to David, he was so handsome and so young. Saul put on David court armour and a helmet of brass, but the lad said: "I cannot go with these, O King!" and he put them off him.

Then, while Saul and Abner and Saul's family and all the army watched him, he took his staff and chose five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in his scrip. His sling was in hand and he moved swiftly towards the Philistines, and Goliath drew slowly near unto David, and the man that carried his shield went before him.

When Goliath saw David he said: "Am I a dog that thou comest to me with staves?" and he cursed David by his gods. Goliath added fiercely: "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field."

Then called David, and all the army heard him, so clear and strong was his voice: "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield, but I to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand. I will take thine head from thee and will give the carcases of the Philistines unto the fowls of the air and the beasts

of the field, that the earth may know there is a God in Israel."

And David ran, and threw down his staff and put a hand in his bag and took thence a stone and swiftly threw it, and the stone sank into Goliath's exposed forehead, and he fell upon his face—to the horror of the Philistines. There was no sword in the hand of David, but he took Goliath's sword and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw Goliath was dead, they turned and fled shrieking, and the men of Israel and of Judah with shouts pursued the Philistines towards their own country of Aijalon.

The Philistines were sorely disheartened and broken, and the destruction was great under Abner and Jonathan. Every Philistine found was killed. At that time the hill-sides were covered with trees and the valley was deeper than it is today. Past Beeroth and Beth-horon towards Aijalon the Philistines flew and were sorely slain.

Saul's great body panted with excitement. He turned to Michal. "Thy prophecy comes true. Behold the victor of this day with the head of the giant in his hand."

Michal did not speak, but she watched David running to the King, and at Saul's feet he placed Goliath's head, and he did not speak. Saul, roused to proud enthusiasm, looked at him with grateful eyes. "Thou hast done Israel service this day. Thou shalt no more return to the hills of Judah. Thou shalt stay in my court, an honoured captain of my army!"

During Saul's short speech to David, Ahinoam and Merab and Michal came close, and Michal's eyes dwelt upon his black hair, his ruddy face and shining eyes. Ahinoam came close to David. "Thou hast the soul of our people in thee, son of Judah."

David bowed low. "Goliath fell by the help of God," he said modestly.

Merab said: "Thou hast saved my father's throne."

Michal coming near to David gazed tenderly at him: "Behold, thou art Israel!"

David looked her in the eyes and instantly he cared for her. "I am thy father's servant and thy friend."

Bathsheba, of Bethlehem, now near to full girlhood, had come with her mother and her elderly uncle to see the Philistine and Jewish army; and she had seen David arrive. Her heart beat fiercely in her young breast, for never had she seen a handsomer or finer youth. She had seen him at Bethlehem twice, and seeing him now, Hezro's words rang in her ears. She had heard them on the day of the anointing. She heard them now as she saw David hand food to his brothers and their captain. Then she had seen David's indignation, and from where she stood, could hear his bitter and challenging words. She saw him brought to Saul, saw David go out with his staff, his scrip and his sling, saw him slay Goliath and all that happened thereafter, though she could not hear what was said. But she saw the tender look of Michal, and young as she was, a dark spirit seized her. Her eyes clouded. With elation she had seen the Philistines flee and the shouting Jews pursue them, and her blood pulsed harder in her body. She turned to her mother.

"David saves Israel today."

"Bethlehem triumphs over Bethlehem," said her mother, meaning that David had triumphed over Saul.

Then they joined in the dancing and singing of the people.

Jonathan had returned with Melchishua from pursuing the Philistines. David and Jonathan had never met, but the souls of both were beating with the same pulses of emotion and mind. They had been struck from the same anvil by the same supreme Hand. Jonathan had been at the head of a division when David had gone out to slay Goliath, and his heart had hammered hard when the stone flew from David's sling. That unerring blow had saved Saul and his throne and Israel. He knew David's brothers in past fighting, but

now he was with the fearless and best soul of Jesse's family, and his heart went out to him. He came to David, stood still and gravely saluted, and David as gravely responded.

"Thou hast saved Israel today."

David shook his head and smiled—and never had his smile more meaning than now—Jonathan had given new temper to his spirit. "Not I—the King of all the world!"

Jonathan glanced at Saul, who in high spirits talked with Abner, and his huge body moved restlessly in excitement. He was once again in sane temper, looking as he did the day after his first battle. Jonathan was not deceived. He read his father aright. Saul was surrounded by his great captains and Abner stood at his side and all the people cheered loudly.

Jonathan saw in David and this day's deed the beginning of a new life for Israel. This David had greatness in him, and he foresaw him ruler of all the land of Jordan. He came close and said softly and firmly: "David of Bethlehem, wilt thou be my brother?"

David looked him steadily in the eyes and read Jonathan's mind and soul. "Jonathan, I will be thy brother."

Straightway Jonathan stripped his right arm and David stripped his. Jonathan's brother, Melchishua, who had returned with him, and had seen the meeting of the two and heard their words, came forward and scarred the arms of each.

Jonathan and David placed their scarred upper arms together and their blood mingled. Then both raised their other hands and said as with one voice:

"Thou art my brother while life and time shall last."

Ahinoam, Merab and Michal watched this touching ceremony. Then Jonathan stripped himself of his outer robe and gave it to David, and his sword and bow and girdle, and David took them gladly because Jonathan had given them. Jonathan turned to his mother and said: "I am thy son, and this is thy son also."

Ahinoam placed her hands upon David's shoulders and

kissed him on both cheeks. "My son!" she said, and Michal, seeing it all, said softly in her heart: "David, my lover!"

Time passed and David was busy with the work Saul had given him to do in the army. David had seen Michal at the slaying of Goliath and in the palace and he had at once been drawn to her, but he was conscious, he knew not why, of a spirit of antagonism in Saul. He saw Jonathan often and their friendship vastly deepened, though Jonathan was busy with the troops also. David also met Melchishua, and Ishui and Ishbosheth, the youngest son of Saul by Ahinoam, and he liked them all, though Ishbosheth was weak and vapid; but they were kind to him. His own brothers Eliab, Nethaneel and Shammah came to see him and he received them warmly. They were jealous of him, yet he had brought honour to the family of Jesse and they praised him carefully.

In the evenings Jonathan made him play his kinnor, and he enraptured all the palace. Saul heard the playing and it greatly refreshed his spirit, and Michal would listen eagerly in her chamber, which was near. People gathered outside the walls, and it went through all the houses that a harpist of Bethlehem could not only slay giants, but could capture the hearts of all. No music—and the Jews were musical—had ever held them like this, and David in his quick sense of conquest for Israel's sake played as he had never played save on the day when he was anointed.

Meanwhile there was further trouble with the Philistines, and Saul and Abner and Jonathan and David went out to strike them hard again, and they pursued them even to the sea, and the slaughter was great. Saul had set David over a thousand men, and he was warmly welcomed by the whole army.

One day, when David with Saul returned from slaughter of the Philistines, women came out of the cities of Israel to meet the King with tabrets and with instruments of music.

They danced and they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands."

Saul was bitterly wroth and he said to Abner: "They have given David tens of thousands and me but thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom!"

A dark spirit grew upon Saul. Wherever he went—in the streets of Jerusalem, in the country, and in his palace—his jealous anger against David increased. He had heard David play in the palace and it had worked well upon his troubled mind, but he had not asked him to play, so little did he like him now.

The life of everyone about Saul was disturbed and troubled. Yet all those connected with his court must be near him.

One night he sat in his audience chamber with his court about him. The room had but a small lamp and shadows fluttered along the walls. Here were faces he had long known looking anxiously at him, for they saw his deep dejection. His wife, Ahinoam, tall, handsome, intelligent and vigilant, sat near. Behind her were Jonathan, Melchi-shua, Ishui and Ishbosheth. Jonathan, the ever faithful friend, looked at his father with sorrow. He felt that this scene would be another great event in the story of Saul's kingship. He had been sorely troubled by the increasing emnity of his father to David. He, more than all his brothers, had been a steadfast support to the throne of Saul, and all the people loved him.

Looking at the people of the court, at Abner and his Gibborim and at the moroseful figure on the throne, he suddenly felt a shudder pass through him. He and Michal would play a greater part in David's life than any of his family. He closed his eyes for a moment, conquered his trembling nerves and regained his poise.

Beside Ahinoam sat Michal, Saul's younger daughter. In the dim light of the chamber her fair hair and brown eyes were, next to Saul's figure on the throne, the most dominant influence in the room. In her face was the spirit which had

belonged ever to the great women of Israel. Her face and that of her mother betrayed no feeling, but they looked at Saul and they wondered what the night would bring forth, because Saul had summoned them all.

The people in the court-room studied the faces of Saul's family, and finding no revelation there they turned to Saul and watched his tragic figure. Abner, Doeg and the Gibborim, with the light of the moon trembling on their spears, stood nearby.

For long Saul sat in silence and all that could be heard was a voice in the streets and the soft singing of a night-bird. At last Saul raised his head and said to Abner: "Send for David."

At these words Ahinoam and Michal did not move, but their eyes shown and all the people of the court turned their faces towards the door. Saul's eyes were also on the doorway.

David slowly entered, bowed low to Saul and glanced swiftly round the chamber. His eyes fell upon Ahinoam and Michal. Into Michal's eyes David flashed a message and her eyelids dropped.

Saul gazed at David's youthful, ruddy face and the smile on David's lips conquered him. David's face had in it the spirit of the hills where they both were born. In David's hands was his kinnor.

"Play," said Saul.

David slowly seated himself and after a moment his voice, never in greater strength and sweetness, chanted now:

"From the end of the Earth will I cleave unto Thee when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

"Arise, O Lord, into thy rest, thou and the Ark of thy strength.

"As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourishes.

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon.

"Stand in awe and sin not, commune with your own heart in your chamber and be still."

As David's words rang out Saul's spirit became quieter and he raised his head with pleasure. All would have been well, but as David finished his chant the people of the court loudly applauded and Abner frowned, for he knew what the effect on Saul would be.

Because of the loud applause, all at once Saul's spirit changed. He moved uneasily, his hands twitched. Quietness fled from him and presently fury seized him. In his dementia his hand touched his javelin. He seized it, lifted it, half rose and threw it angrily. His eyes were not true and David escaped the weapon. Saul then seized Abner's javelin and threw it more deftly, but David again avoided it, and it stuck in the wall and quivered there. Then David bowed to Saul and quickly left the chamber.

He was followed by Jonathan, who put a hand on his shoulder. "Jehovah is with thee, David; His hand turned the javelin."

"I fear not, but I would not tempt him further. People have too much praised me." He turned and took Jonathan's hands. "With thy friendship my heart shall be strong and in Jehovah's name I shall endure."

In the great chamber the king waved his hand fiercely to the courtiers and they hastily left, and Saul was left with Abner and his family. He sat brooding and panting, and Ahinoam said: "Thou didst ill to try to slay him, Saul."

Saul did not answer.

Michal, very pale, said: "To slay one that saved thy throne!"

Abner courteously waved them from the chamber and they left. Ahinoam with bowed head gravely kissed Michal and passed on. Michal hastened to her chamber.

In the great chamber Abner said: "Thy javelin cannot slay the saviour of thy throne, King Saul!"

Saul staggered to his feet, then, without a word, went over

and drew the javelin from the wall. "This is thine, sarsaba. Now go from me." Abner took it, then bowing, left the chamber.

All the people were gossiping wildly in their houses and in the streets. For long Saul sat and brooded in his chamber, talking darkly to himself. The King of Israel was alone, as he believed. But Doeg, the Edomite, from a shaded corner watched him. At last Saul looked up and saw Doeg. With a guttural cry he beckoned to him.

CHAPTER X

DAVID WEDS MICHAL

AFTER the scene in the palace when Saul threw his own and Abner's javelins at David, and all Israel talked excitedly in the houses and streets, Saul went to bed depressed and rose with his dementia gone. He recalled with disgust the past night's event. He could not alter what had happened, but he could atone, yet the atonement would be a further danger to David. As he saw the sun rise over the hills of Moab and the river Jordan, he planned a way to give David joy and sorrow. He would wed David to his eldest daughter, Merab. That would be joy, and the sorrow would follow, for Merab should be a snare to bring evil to David. His brain was working clearly yet darkly.

He went from the palace and passed through the streets with Abner and his Gibborim and he was glad that the people applauded him. He was a majestic figure, and concrete things were near and dear to the Jewish people. His dark deed of the night before made him carry himself with greater dignity now, and he bowed his head to the growing cheers of the people. For two hours he passed the streets and the people flocked round him. Quick to love or to hate, the

people now forgot last night's evil deed which they had not seen, and they cheered him.

The next morning he summoned David. David, in some anxiety, came, for he was only now beginning to realize Saul. He entered Saul's presence quietly yet watchfully. Saul welcomed him friendly and kissed him on both cheeks, then he said slowly:

"My daughter Merab I will give thee to wife. Only be thou valiant and fight the Lord's battles."

David was perturbed. "Who am I, and what is my father's family that I should be the son of the King?"

The crafty Saul eyed him furtively and replied: "Who was I that I should be king, Saul, the son of Kish! My father had no wealth or power, but he was of the family of Matri, and I was chosen king."

David seemed to read at the back of Saul's dark eyes an ambush being laid, but he said: "Thou wert chosen king, not because thou wert of the family of Matri or because Kish, thy father, had neither wealth nor power, but for greatness in thee. Thou hast done well for Israel."

Saul's eye lighted. "I builded Israel up, but by slaying Goliath thou didst hand me back my kingdom. I would make thee of my own family by the marriage of my daughter Merab. Yonder she comes."

Saul left David, and Merab entered. She had good looks but little brains. He bowed in greeting, but women with commonplace intelligence are only repelled by fame and commanding intellect which place the lesser minds at disadvantage. She was not drawn to David. Her father could marry her to David, but she was already impressed by another—and he was a spark to the sun compared to David. Adriel of Abel Mehodah, ten miles south of Bethlehem, was all in all to her.

She smiled at David now and he said: "In old days Israelites were slaves in Egypt. One Israelite is a slave in this Promised Land."

Merab slightly flushed. She read the ironical note behind the words. "Thou art slave to thyself only, David."

"Then I will condemn myself to freedom."

Merab almost laughed. "Thou hast the gift of words at least. Thou slayest giants, but beware of pygmies, David."

"Thou art right; the flea is more dangerous than the camel."

"Oh, to be killed by a flea!" she said demurely.

"Let us be good friends, Merab. Thou and I shall not be wed while Saul is King of Israel!"

"Now I am thy slave and obey thy will!" Merab's voice was pleasantly ironical, for they had been playing with words, and now her heart was glad, for she had no affection for David, and she saw her younger sister Michal coming. Here lay David's fate. He should marry Michal, and her heart was lifted up. Saul, her father, would be defeated by David and Michal. She knew Michal's mind about David; she had watched her. In her talk with David, Merab had gone beyond her average mind by David's cleverness, and he had lifted her beyond herself.

She said now: "So fare thee well, David! Hither comes Michal." With a low laugh she left the chamber.

After the killing of Goliath, David had been won by Michal's fair hair and dark eyes, her supple figure and the grace of all her motions. She and David at first meeting had "exchanged eyes." She entered now and for a moment looked without speaking, and then David bowed low.

"I heard of thy prophecies at the fight with the Ammonites, Michal, and at my fight with Goliath. Thou hast the soul of Israel."

Michal's cheeks were slightly flushed, but her eye was steady. Her only nervousness was in the light clasping of her fingers. "The love of our people is in my soul. The heart of Israel stood still when a shepherd boy ran out to meet Goliath, but Jehovah was with thee. Who shall not praise thee, David?"

David flushed. "Until now no woman has ever moved me. I bow to thee, daughter of Saul the king." Never was David so handsome. His eyes shone. "In the hills of Judah I learned the secret of life—to care deeply for the one great thing; the growth, the hope, the fate of Israel; and now, the love of a human being—with the blessing of Jehovah I love thee, Michal."

These were days when men loved quickly. Time had little to do with it. The heart and soul were all.

Michal's eyes lighted. At last she came nearer and said: "I give thee my hand, David, and while life lasts my inner story is for thee."

David fell on a knee and kissed her hand; then he rose. "Blessed art thou among women, Michal!"

She withdrew her hand. "We have scarce spoken together, David, but I have known thee since my eyes first opened. None ever touched my heart till I saw thee. None shall ever touch my heart again but thee."

The joy of life was now deep in David. He raised his arms towards the sky. "Israel, beloved Israel—Michal, beloved Michal! We dance, we Jewish people, and I could dance before thee now, Michal, for shining days are come."

At that moment Abner entered the chamber. He saw the fullness of the drama. "David, the King of Israel bids thee come."

Michal, with a smile at David, left the chamber. She hurried to her own room, threw herself upon the floor and rocked her body in joy, for this was the greatest day she had ever known. She lifted eyes to heaven. "O Thou, in whose hands are all destinies, save me from all evil, cherish me with good hope—O God of Abraham and all the prophets!"

David returned with Abner to the king. Saul knew by the look in their faces what had chanced. His own eyes lighted. "David, thou art to wed my daughter Merab!"

"I would marry Michal, not Merab, O King of Israel!"

Saul gazed astonished; then after a moment said: "So be it, David."

"But, Sir, I have no dowry for thy daughter."

Saul was amazed that David had won Michal and not Merab, and he knew he could not influence Michal as easily as he could Merab. He would plan to have David killed by the Philistines. He could see David alone fighting the Philistines, and he foresaw his almost certain death. He would put the dowry high, and trust to Fate to rid him of this marked figure in his kingdom.

"A hundred Philistines slain by thy hand shall be her dowry, David."

"I will slay them and bring proof, King of Israel."

Saul touched David's cheek—he had as yet no beard—and it was an affectionate touch, but his eyes were furtive.

David went from Saul's presence with war and happiness in his musing eyes. He loved Saul, and he could not have believed that Saul would use Michal simply as a snare. Saul wished the Philistines to slay David, but he did not know that Jehovah who anointed him had also anointed David and would care for him in the darkest day. He saw David go forth with erect figure, and he frowned heavily. "'Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands,' thus the people shouted," he said to Abner.

"Thine armies have slain the Philistines and driven them to the sea because David slew Goliath. Give David high office, marry him to Michal and thou shalt find him ever loyal to thee."

Saul nodded sourly. "Yes, David has done much, but there can only be one great figure in Israel. None must be more honoured by the people than their King."

Abner nodded. He had great military skill, and he was honest and reliable. "None is more honoured in Israel than thee. David will bring proof of the slaying of the Philistines to thee. Wilt thou arrange his wedding of Michal?"

Saul hesitated, then rose and said: "Summon the people."

Jonathan met David outside Saul's chamber. He had heard all that had been said. He clasped David's arm. "Thy star shines bright, David. All will be well with thee."

David grasped Jonathan's both hands. "As Jehovah wills." So he went alone to fight the Philistines and his heart was glad.

Later Saul went forth and before his palace said to the great crowds that they should see his daughter Michal marry David. He listened to the tremendous cheering and saw the happiness of the people, yet all the time his heart grew harder.

David went straight to the district of Aijalon, and in Philistine clothes he lay in wait inside the walls. At length he saw fifty Philistines eat freely and drink much native wine, and lie down to sleep. He moved swiftly among them and stabbed them one by one to the heart, and though some cried out in a smothered way, all were killed and fifty signs were at David's belt.

"All must be got this night or not at all."

He came to the threshing floor of Aijalon, and here, after a long carouse, a hundred and fifty Philistines lay down to sleep. All slept save two, and when David came near they sprang to their feet; but David slew them both as he had slain Goliath. They fell dead without a sound. In another half-hour he had a hundred and fifty signs at his belt.

Then he marched back towards Gibeah and he met Jonathan ere he came to the palace. They embraced, and seeing the signs at David's belt, Jonathan's eye lighted. "Thou hast the signs?"

"Double the signs," said David joyfully, and they made their way to the palace.

David and Jonathan were admitted to Saul. Touching the belt Saul said: "Didst thou kill all with thine own hand?"

"If I who killed Goliath cannot kill two hundred lesser men, let me return to my hills of Judah!"

Jonathan intervened. "His word is true."

Putting his hands on David's shoulder Saul kissed him on both cheeks, but his heart was evil.

"In five days thou shalt marry Michal," Saul said, with assumed kindness. He sent word throughout Israel by swift messengers, and grimly he watched the people come.

A vast number of Israelites assembled at Gibeah, and the greatest singers of the nation, led by Heman; and the great army officers, and Nathan and Gad the prophets, and Doeg the Edomite, were at Saul's command.

On the wedding day the troops made three-quarters of a circle before the palace, having first passed before Saul and Ahinoam and Merab and Jonathan, and Melchishua, Ishui and Ishbosheth.

Obeying Saul, Jonathan brought two hundred singers into the broken circle and their voices rang out:

"The King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation now greatly shall he rejoice!

"Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.

"For thou presentest him with the blessings of goodness, thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.

"His glory is great in thy salvation; honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.

"For thou hast made him most blessed forever; thou hast made him exceedingly glad with thy countenance.

"Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength; so will we sing and praise thy power."

There were scores of thousands of Israelites present, and the colours of their robes shone gaily in the morning sun. Naught could be more striking than the long robes, the head-dresses, the veil drawn under the chin of the women, one side of it tucked into a band of blue cloth bound round, sometimes embroidered with yellow or red; nose-rings of gold and silver, bangles worn at the ankles and bracelets on the arms. Sometimes the women tattooed their faces and with their dark

skins and bright eyes, the glamour of dramatic contrast was over all.

At length David came with Joab, who was to become his great general, a man of fighting power and personality, evil but able, cruel and strong; and also Abishai and Asahel, all Behind David were his father Jesse, his mother Judith and all his brothers save Shammah and Raddai. The brothers were envious, though they hid it behind outer smiles. They were vain, and David's victory over Goliath and his marriage with the daughter of the King gave glory to them.

David's mother kissed his head and said: "I gave thee life, and thou dost return it a thousandfold. Today thou dost marry the daughter of the King!"

Eliab said: "Who could have thought that thou, the youngest, should rise so high so soon?"

Nethaneel said: "The flight of the hawk, but not of the eagle."

Ozem added: "The hawk is for carrion but the eagle for the sky."

David smiled at Ozem; then to all he said: "Jehovah shows Himself my family's friend and the deeper friend of Israel."

Saul came slowly from his palace with Ahinoam and Merab and his sons other than Jonathan, and his sarsaba Abner, followed by other sars and michars,* and Doeg; and Ahimelech the high priest led the way, and Nathan and Gad were waiting with the people.

When Saul saw David's family he paused. "Jesse, my Benjamite, thou comest to see thy son David married to my daughter."

Zeuriah and Abigail and the brothers bowed low. "We are thy children, O King," said Eliab, "and this day brings us closer to thy throne."

Saul nodded his immense head. "The throne needs loyal help. Today I lift thy brother beside me."

* Captains.

Saul's stature was above all his people and his face had now the signs of that dementia which was to be the ruin of his own life and that of his family. His inner circle knew the real truth and they were like the usual courtiers, ready to transfer their allegiance—but that was far off still.

Presently men and women began to dance, and the dance grew more exciting, but between the singing of the vast choir and the dancing of hundreds, a wave of emotion passed through the whole assembly. Singing and dancing were sacred ceremonies of the life of the people, and it took the place of art and sculpture and all things else. The Jews were a primitive people and far behind the Egyptians and Assyrians and the Babylonians in art. A wandering folk, they had been under patriarchs and judges and prophets and were now under their first king, a democratic theocracy, in which the central spirit of the universe, through His prophets, still commanded them. There was no strife between the old system of the prophets and the new system of the kings. It was the advance of a nation which from the days of Abraham had been wanderers and were now building up against the Philistines, the Moabites, the Amelekites, the Syrians and the people of the north at Damascus and the people of the south at Negeb, the sturdy fortresses of an ingathering but expanding people. It was ingathering because they were building up cities and no longer dwelling in tents like the Ishmaelites, and they were founding an empire.

The singing of the people, and the "Looliloo—Looliloo!" of the excited dancers gave a larger sense of nationality.

Ahimelech, the high priest, waved a hand towards the singers and dancers and presently the singing and dancing ceased.

It was the late afternoon.

Now there came down the steps of the palace Jonathan with Michal, and they moved with dignity to the shouts of welcome of the people to where were Saul and Ahinoam and his family. When they reached Saul, the King took

Michal's hand and led her forward slowly to the high priest. Then began the ceremony.

Michal and David moved forward together. The hands of both were raised solemnly and the marriage oath was taken in the name of the Lord of Hosts. Then they kissed on each side of the head. Michal was very young. David was also young, and there was in the eyes of both what would stay until life was done—love, the beginning and the end of all. Michal, David's first love, would be the deepest emotion of his life. Bathsheba, whom he had not yet seen, would be in coming days his most powerful passion, but deeper than Bathsheba or any other would be Michal, who had character and soul. Both she and her mother, Ahinoam, were greater than Saul because truer to the inner things; both less than Saul because he founded the Kingdom of Israel. So long as the kingdom lasted he would be as much greater than all round him, as David would be greater than he.

This afternoon the sun seemed to stand still as in the time of Joshua, and when the marriage oath was taken a great shout went up. Soldiers waved their sticks and bows and arrows and swords and spears, and the air was a gleaming forest. The high priest blessed the two whose names would ever stand in the varied story of the Jewish people.

The singers sang once more and the dancing became a frenzy of emotions. Even the heart of Saul was touched. It suddenly came to him that life had a new significance. This would not last—it could not—but it was of the day. Slowly and with dignity Saul, followed by Ahinoam, and then David and Michal; and then his family, and Abner and high officers following, walked back to the palace on the hill, and the people followed rejoicing.

Until nightfall dancing and singing went on, and Israel rose from the lesser level to the higher plateau. The carols of the birds were lost in the louder acclaim of all the people.

CHAPTER XI

THE NEXT MORNING

AT the first glimmer of dawn David gazed out upon the place. In the distance womenfolk with water jars gracefully balanced on their heads were coming from the big well outside the walls. Their feet were shod in sandals, and with their dark eyes, pale oval faces and gaily decorated gowns and jewelry, their pendants, bracelets, ankle-chains, sashes, their head-tires and cauls, they made a picture of infinite charm.

He turned and looked at Michal asleep—one arm thrown over her head, her face against the pillow, her long eye-lashes on her pale cheek, her breast rising and falling softly. David looked long with the eyes of a poet and a dreamer. This was his first love, and he did not foresee how this girl would save him more than once from the death devised by her father. He knew Saul hated him, and it was beyond his ken how such a child as this should be his daughter. Her great qualities came from her mother, who had steadiness of mind and beautiful simplicity of life. Saul had been the anointed of the Lord and would continue as king, but his mind had begun to show dangerous impulses, and his heart was eaten up with jealousy of the lad to whom he had given his daughter. He had only married Michal to David to make her a snare. Yet he felt not sure of her. Saul had sacrificed his daughter on the altar of his own selfishness.

David had not brought silver bracelets, rings and garments of silk for the bride and her mother, girdles and embroidered scarves. He had brought only Goliath, and the two hundred Philistines he had slain, as the dowry. She had been married in a beautiful veil covering her face, and a wedding garment, a long, bright-coloured robe of silk. The harp and the one-stringed fiddle had been the popular instruments with the dancing at their wedding. In the palace the wedding supper

had been prepared—lentils and peas and beans and artichokes and mandrakes and mallows, dishes of meat and vegetables and sweet cakes, and dates and raisins and many fruits; also gazelles, hares, ibex, lambs, birds of which there were many kinds in Palestine—the thrush, the lark, the wheatear, the heron, the pigeon, and so on. When night came after the day of feasting, flaming torches and lamps were held aloft, and women raised their voices in the wavering cry: "Looliloo —Looliloo." In the distance as the day wore on, could be heard the cry "Looliloo—looliloo," and it had rung in David's ears all the happy night, and there had come to his mind the words: "My love is like the dew upon the green, her face is as a basket of summer flowers to me."

As he turned from Michal again he saw men stroking each other's beards in the streets, or, now and then, plucking them, which is the greatest shame to be offered, and from this come to physical struggle. Looking out he also saw a woman with her hair loose, running through the streets, and loose hair is a token of abasement. He shook his head in sorrow. Swearing by the hair of the head or by the beard is a solemn pledge of one's manhood, and an oath not to be taken lightly. The hair was sacred in the Jewish personality.

This was the life he had to face. In this palace of Saul were slaves, and Hebrews became slaves for some offence for which a fine could not be paid, a theft which could not be made good, for debt or destitution. The master bored his slave's ear—the symbol—with an awl—a significant way of nailing his obedience to a particular house.

If a beseiged city opened its gates, the people became subject to task-work, but if they resisted, then all males should be put to death. Only the women and children were spared to become slaves. They were made hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation. A slave might be flogged even to the point of death, and if he did not die immediately, but lingered on, no punishment was given his owner. Hebrew slaves were mainly domestic and agricultural. They could

rise to posts of influence and authority in the household, and even, like Jarha, the slave of Shashan, marry their master's daughter. A real affection might exist between master and slave, and the latter might prefer his servitude to freedom. He might be severely flogged, but then so were the children of the house. A Hebrew slave had a right to release, but a foreigner remained a bond-slave for life. He could be sold to another master, but the daughter of the house was likewise property to be sold in the same way. Such slaves were in the palace of Saul, brought from his conquests of different peoples; they were not unhappy or ill-treated.

As David looked from the roof he saw a punishment of death on a guilty person—by being flung from a height and having a heavy stone hurled upon his chest. To this victim a narcotic of one grain of frankincense was administered to take away the edge of the terror. This he could see on the borders of the town, and at another point people were being stoned for some lesser offence than murder. By the new spirit in his soul, on the morning after his marriage he foresaw the troubles in his path.

David went at last to the bed where Michal lay, and gazed at her, his chin in his hand, his deep eyes shining, and at his heart the quiver of grave trouble. He knew not how it was, but the spirit of Jehovah was working in him. There came to his mind the words: "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone on the house-top." He knew not why he thought these words with Michal there!

Down in his chamber King Saul was talking to Abner, his general, with excitement: "Cousin and friend, the light upon my path is not clear. Yesterday we rejoiced at the marriage of my daughter but today darkness comes. I am King of Israel, and one by one the nations bend to my will, but my sea of life is troubled."

Abner, a man of courage and straightness, saw the trend of Saul's mind. He knew that yesterday's marriage was a

political move meant to be the death of David. He did not share Saul's evil purposes. He stretched a hand and said: "If the sea of thy life is troubled, O King, the trouble is not outside this palace, or this room, but in it!"

Anger flashed from Saul's eyes: "There are but two of us here. Which disturbs the waters of my life?"

Abner stretched both hands with a smile: "Not mine, my lord the King. These fight for thee, not against thee."

Saul fiercely struck his breast with his right hand. "Art thou not my cousin? By Yahwe, the waters of my life shall overwhelm thee, Abner. Is it I that cause turmoil in my heart, and among my people!—I am Saul, the King, the anointed of God, the master of Israel, the hope and faith of my people. Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen to me."

A curious distant light came into Abner's eyes. "King of our people, thou wert and art their faith and hope, but the prophet Samuel, by the will of Jehovah, ended that for thee. Thou hast far to go, King Saul, but thy way will be stony, and sorrow and tragedy will pierce thee as though it were the javelin in thine hand."

In King Saul's left hand was a javelin. It was the sign and token of his authority, and he flung it into his right and raised it, as though to smite Abner, but Abner folded his arms and raised his head defiantly.

"Kill me! Then the day of thy ruin in Israel will soon come, O King. Kill me, and thou and Jonathan and all thy family will fall. Under thee have I helped to conquer thy foes. Under thee will I try to save thee from thyself, for at this moment thou art mad. Strike, and abide the end!"

Abner's eyes flashed fire, his face paled, his body stiffened with manly purpose.

The javelin was lowered, and Saul trembled. "Get thee gone, thou dark spirit, and God curse thy bones!"

Abner's pale face flushed. "I will obey my ruler in the

day of his madness, but my bones shall be blessed, not cursed, O King."

He came slowly to Saul, stretched a hand and stroked his beard. "Not the hand of thy sarsaba strokes thy beard. It is that of one who loves thee well. Master of Israel, the same blood flows in our veins. I would not be monarch if I could. Mine is a lesser part. I am the constant friend of the King of Israel. May God abate the evil in thy heart and give thee peace."

His voice was low and soft. His eye shone with family love, with national pride, with the same spirit that drove David on to exile and danger and everlasting triumph in the end. Saul seated himself, his huge body shaking with emotion. He reached a brown, hairy and powerful hand towards Abner.

"Get thee gone in peace, and the blessing of Jehovah be with thee. Behold, I have sinned."

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "Assemble my troops, Abner. I would speak with them. In six hours have them here."

He was a man of giant impulses, immense prejudices and of capable yet variable mind. Once so modest that he had to be dragged to his kingship, he was now so vain that all his life and all his motions were self-conscious. He loved his people but he loved his kingship more, and his kingship was himself. Greatness was in him but littleness too, and he would march from conquest to conquest, and then from defeat to defeat, and at last, with his sons, pay for the evil he had done.

Abner bowed his head gravely. "Thy will is my law, King Saul!" and presently he was gone.

From a window Saul watched his quick steady footsteps, and he nodded and said: "A man, aye, a man of courage, with incurable honesty of soul."

He was about to leave the room when he saw Doeg, his dark herdsman, looking towards the palace. Saul summoned a guard. "Bring hither Doeg the Edomite," he said.

Then while he waited he paced the room. The evil face of Doeg had again inflamed his soul against David. Abner had conquered him, but down beneath everything was hatred of David, who had killed Goliath and brought tribute of the Philistines, and was a valiant warrior. His debt to David was prodigious, but his hatred was immense. Great soldier, his character had ceased to be great.

Doeg entered the room. He was not tall, he was broad, low-browed, black-haired, with beady, hateful eyes and a bearded face. He had little neck, and his head, big and broad, though narrow in the crown, was the sign of his hateful character. His hands were long, gnarled and hairy, his feet were huge. The glimmer of a smile easily played in his reddish eyes. He bowed low.

"I am thy servant. My hand and soul are thine, my King."

Saul did not speak yet. He paced the floor, and the evil thought was in every step. He paused. Then he slowly seated himself, and beckoned. Doeg came. He motioned to him to kneel. Doeg did so.

"Raise thy hand, Doeg." A hand was raised. "Now swear in the words I shall give."

"*I, Doeg, the Edomite, pledge my soul that I will do the will of my King in all things while I live.*"

Doeg's hoarse voice repeated the words, and when he had finished Saul motioned him to his feet.

"I am thy servant, O King, what wouldst thou have me do?"

Saul's own eyes became yellow with hatred. He whispered in Doeg's ear, and at Saul's words, Doeg's face took on a flame of malice and evil joy.

"In the hour that my King needs me, his will shall be done."

CHAPTER XII

THE ARREST OF DAVID

DAVID, who through Jonathan had come to know the evil Saul would do against him so soon after his marriage, went to live with Michal in the lower part of Gibeah not far from Saul's palace. The house was secluded and well built, and the people saw he attended court no more. One day Jonathan came. At the door Michal's eyes met his with understanding. "The King would kill the man I love!"

Jonathan inclined his head. "Thou art but the trap for his dark will. The day of thy wedding and the singing and dancing and review of troops, and the applause of the people were all majestic pretence. David's life is to be the one lasting thing in Israel, yet Saul would end it all——"

The young wife broke in: "I understand. Saul is great; he conquers our foes, but the greatness of him lessens. Jealousy is in him. He who was once so modest has grown vain. All men who do great things move in great dreams, and great dreams are dementia!"

Jonathan nodded. "David must flee this house. Saul's guards watched me as I left the palace."

At that moment David entered. Seeing Jonathan his face lighted and he kissed him on the cheek. "Naught shall break our friendship, but there is trouble in thine eye. Speak."

"Flee, lest my father's men destroy thee."

David's face clouded, but he threw back his head with a slight laugh. "The King would kill his son!"

He turned towards Michal and held out a hand. She came swiftly, her hand clasped his firmly, her eyes showed her love.

She placed David's hand upon her head. "I am thy servant, David, and thy wife. I beg thee, do what Jonathan bids thee."

Jonathan suddenly turned towards the window. "See yonder, Saul's men under Doeg. Get thee gone, David!"

David nodded and quietly started for the door, but Michal shook her head. "The staircase is outside the house in front. Thou wilt be seen. I will lower thee from the rear." With Jonathan's help she hastily made a rope of carob fibre.

"To flee is not good, but I would not fight Saul's men, or kill one of them, or be slain by them. I shall go alone, but send my nephew Joab after me."

He made his preparations hastily, and a moment later with food at his girdle he was let down from the back of the house, and Jonathan left by the front, in sight of Saul's men and Doeg. Jonathan softly called back to the house:

"Michal, beware!"

Michal hastily made an image of teraphim,* placed it in David's bed and put on its head the usual goat's hair cap worn by shepherds and invalids, and covered the figure with a mantle.

Doeg passed Jonathan with a furtive eye, and Jonathan, as though troubled in spirit, shook his head to deceive, and Doeg and his men entered David's home. Doeg and two men mounted to the roof and Michal showed them the figure in the bed. Her eyes were dim with tears.

"He is ill, ye must not take him."

Doeg's orders from Saul had been to arrest David, but he could not arrest a sick man. After a moment's doubt, with his men he returned to the palace. The King saw him coming without David and his face darkened. Saul's fury broke out. "Why didst thou not bring David?"

Doeg shook his head. "I had no orders to arrest a man sick in bed."

"Then bring him in bed, viper!"

Doeg angrily went back to David's home and mounted to the roof. There Michal sat beside the couch.

"The King orders thy husband to the palace."

* Images in human form—whole figure or head and shoulders only.

Michal showed much emotion. "He is ill and he is sleeping now. He must not be wakened."

A half hour later there was borne into Saul's presence the bed on which David lay, but the blanket was drawn over his head and body, and he was not visible. When the bed was placed upon the floor, Saul waved all out save Doeg. Then Doeg snatched away the blanket, exposing the fraud prepared by Michal—the false figure of David. Saul's anger was intense.

"I have been outwitted. Michal shall die, but not till I have captured David, and he shall see her slain."

Even Doeg shuddered. "Thou wouldst not slay thine own daughter! Slay the man for he is evil, but thine own daughter is blood of thy blood and flesh of thy flesh. Not even I could do this thing for thee." He recalled his own young daughter Ruth.

Saul struck his breast with his hand three times.

"He has gone to Samuel at Ramah, so get thee to Ramah, the sanctuary, and heed not protests, and bring him hither."

As Doeg left the room, Saul paced it with hatred in his face and heart, his great body twitching with anger.

When David left his home, he went straight through the trees to Ramah, which was near. Samuel met him at the door. "Art thou in trouble, David?"

David threw back his head and his eyes were vexed. "I will return to my sheep in the hills of Judah where I shall have peace. Only trouble stays my footsteps now. There Michal and I shall begin life again."

"Why shouldst thou flee from where God hath sent thee? The dawn of Israel is near and thou art the sun of that dawn. Thou art David of Israel, and God is with thee to the end. Thou shalt stay here among my young men. Dost thou forget all thy triumphs, all the hopes of the Hebrews! Is it all forgotten because a recreant king wishes to slay thee?" He raised a hand in anger. "This hand slew Agag, King of

the Ammonites. It has known blood, but it has known peace. Between blood and peace is thy destiny. David, thine arm shall slay, but thine heart shall be in peace in the end. Thou shalt be king of Israel and Judah."

There now passed over David's face the light of destiny which, through blood and plague and tears and sin and repentance and great things done for Israel, would bring him to glory and peace at last. He raised his head slowly and a smile came to his lips.

"I will abide. Never till now have I felt the greatness of my fate."

"Thou shalt be pursued, thou shalt be an outlaw, thou shalt live with the foes of our people, thou shalt deceive, thou shalt slay, but behind all shall be eternal truth in thee. It leads thee on."

He took David's head in his hands and kissed it. "We will now sacrifice in the name of the Lord our God before all here at Ramah."

There, with the choir of thirty singers, led by Heman and Samuel's sons, Joel and Abiah, and his wife and other women, they made a burnt-offering to the Lord, and the chants they now sang to David's harp rang out in the hills and reached the ears of Doeg and his men on their way to capture David.

When Saul's messengers came near to the Jewish college, heard the singing and saw the robed priests and the young men, their pulses beat faster. Presently, when the young men, to David's harp, began to dance, the native spirit of the ancient ceremonial came into them. Suddenly they joined in the dancing, and in the light of their eyes, though not holy, was like the dawn of which Samuel had spoken. "The roseate hues of early dawn, the brightness of the skies" was with them, and even Doeg could have no effect upon them. He ground his teeth and spat upon the ground and cursed them all by the heathen gods of Edom, but the singing and the dancing grew and David was safe.

While Israel lasted, these religious colleges such as Ramah were centres of education and patriotism and religion. Universities are homes of inspiration and culture, and so in that far-off day this school was the haven of the people. All the twelve tribes, separate peoples of the one blood, met there. Their influence is best shown by the fact that these evil messengers sent by Saul danced while Doeg went to say to Saul that the messengers had been conquered at Ramah.

When Saul heard what Doeg said his rage was great. "The dog shall die, and the hand of the King shall bring him hither. Summon a hundred Gibborim—the King will go to Ramah!"

Doeg, inwardly cursing, went to do his bidding, and Saul made preparations to leave the palace. When he was ready to start, Lokman, an Ethiop, in his service, with quiet yet sardonic eyes said to him: "Thy path is stony, and at its end is a garden, Saul."

"May God burn the bones of thy fathers, Ethiop! What is that garden?"

"The garden of Jehovah where is peace for Israel."

Saul shrugged a shoulder, for he was not sure what Lokman meant. He had come to him but a month before after the defeat of the Amalekites, and because he had an interesting face which Saul could not understand, and a bitter tongue for the fawning courtiers, the King had favoured him. "Thou shalt come with me to see David caught by me."

Lokman bowed low. "I am thy slave," he said.

The afternoon was moving on, and Ahinoam, who had bitterly resented Saul's treatment of David and Michal, watched his nervous preparations, and she called Rizpah, his one concubine. "I have no influence with Saul now. Do thou speak to him, Rizpah."

Rizpah was come of the Moabite people on her mother's side, and she was very beautiful and quiet and had great dignity and good-nature. It was the custom to have many wives in Israel, but Saul had had only one and this concubine,

and she now said: "Saul is not the King he was. Darkness has come upon his spirit. I will speak to him, but be thou near, Ahinoam."

She went to Saul and said: "Is it right for the King of Israel to do what one of his captains can well do?"

Saul turned on her sourly, though he loved her, and said: "Shall not the King arrest his own son? Shall that be left for lesser hands?"

"Yet thou mayst not arrest this conqueror of Goliath, and the saviour of Israel!"

"Saviour of Israel! Am not I saviour of Israel? Have I not beaten all surrounding peoples? Have I not builded Israel up?"

"Yet thou art still vassal to the Philistines, and David defeated the Philistines."

"There can only be one great figure in Israel, and I am he!" Saul thundered. "I go to bring my son against his will to feast with me. Tomorrow I shall banquet him!"

In great rage he placed his huge figure in front of his Gibborim as Rizpah turned to Ahinoam with a gesture of despair. Ahinoam shook her head, and laid a hand affectionately on Rizpah's shoulder. Together, Rizpah a little behind Ahinoam, they watched Saul, who did not say good-bye to either, march savagely away in the afternoon light.

As he went towards Ramah, a rainbow appeared in the sky, and Saul nodded to it. "Thou art my hope," he said with proud satire, and Lokman who was near him said naught, but he took it as a good omen for David.

At length they neared Ramah, and the sounds of the singing and dancing came to them. They suddenly had a full view of it, and the priests and students and Saul's men mad with enthusiasm singing and dancing, and the setting sun in all its varied glory behind, purple and pink and violet and that glory of the sky which only Palestine knows.

It all burst upon the sight of Saul with the violence of a storm of music, and he recalled his own anointing and the

singing and dancing then. He stopped short, stood confused for a moment, then his great body began to sway from side to side, his head lifted up, and at last overwhelmed by the greater thing in him, the ancient custom of Israel, he threw off his outer garments and with his great voice roaring, joined in the dance. It mattered not to him that David and Samuel saw him. To him they were only part of some musical dream, as far from him as Mount Hermon.

David and Samuel watched him with elation, for the soul of Israel was greater than the man. Hour after hour the frantic rejoicing went on, Saul oblivious of David and Samuel. Only at midnight did Saul cease dancing and singing and sink upon the ground and fall asleep, with the sullen Doeg standing over him. Doeg watched him and his men morosely. When the sun rose he roused Saul, who was in a kind of stupor and only feebly realized where he was and what he had done. He had forgotten David and his arrest. The light of the morning sun was in his eyes, and Lokman, not speaking, helped him to dress.

Saul left the college heavily, and they marched slowly back to Gibeah. Samuel and David looked happily after them, and there was a smile on David's ruddy face.

CHAPTER XIII

DAVID FLEES FROM SAUL

DAVID was still uneasy at Ramah. He feared the treachery of Saul. Samuel and he were sitting on a bench inside the house at Naioth where the prophet and students lived. Through the big window they could see Nob standing high where the tragedy was to come to Ahimelech, the high priest, and many other priests; they could see Anatoth where Abiathar was born and Baanah and Beth-horon, and within an arrow's flight almost the palace of Saul at Gibeah.

It was a morning when the sun shines vividly over all the land. Looking at the palace of Saul, David turned to the prophet, who sat brooding, his long fingers twisting gently his beard which reached to his waist, his eyes on the hills.

David spoke softly to him. "My presence here so close to the palace brings danger to you all. I will go to Nob where the Ark was carried after Shiloh was destroyed. In that little place I shall be received well as a son-in-law of Saul."

Samuel turned slowly to him. "God hath spoken, David. This place is sanctuary, but no safety is here while Saul rules."

David shook his head sadly. His eyes were turned towards the house hdden by the trees where he had left Michal. He turned to Samuel. "Michal must come here, if thou wilt permit it."

Samuel laid a hand on David's shoulder. "She will be welcomed here, but her father may break faith with this sanctuary. Then she would find refuge among our people. My heart is with thee, David."

David's eyes became gloomy. "I go from here an outlaw. Before me are years of wandering and strife, yet everywhere shall the will to do my duty go. Somehow I feel that all shall be well with Michal—thou art her friend! Meanwhile my father and mother are in danger. I am the great-grandson of Ruth, and Ruth was a Moabite. Though Moab is an ancient foe, my father and mother will be safe in that land. The Moabites come from Abraham."

Samuel nodded. "Moses died at Pisgah in Moab, and for that the land is sacred, yet she has sinned! For her sin she will be punished. Go to Moab on that good mission and God's blessing be over thee."

Samuel left the chamber, and Joel and Abiah, his sons, entered and came near. David saw them with understanding eyes. With a cynical smile, Joel said: "Thou didst marry the King's daughter, and thou hast fled from him. Trouble follows thee."

David's face hardened. "I am here where thy father

teaches all to serve this land with loyal souls. Ye are not loyal—ye bring shame on the greatest prophet of Israel since Moses." His eyes grew like steel. "I have no fear, yet to save my life I go. Also I would keep your father from insult. Out of my path!" he sternly added as they came nearer as though to bar his way, and they drew back. He entered at the door. "Ye disgrace Israel."

Samuel entered the chamber, his eyes afire, his figure erect. "I heard you talk with David. His words were true—ye disgrace Israel. Get ye from my sight!"

They were confounded before Samuel's grim anger. They had no moral force; they left the chamber looking fearfully behind them.

Towards the morning of the next day David, with a few followers, passed from Naioth through the pines, cedars and terebinth trees over the lonely land to the little city of Nob in the hills. He arrived there at dawn and the people welcomed him.

Ahimelech, the chief priest of Nob, was of timid but faithful nature. He received David warmly as the son-in-law of Saul and gave food to him and his friends.

When David had slain Goliath, the sword of the giant had been given to Ahimelech by Saul, and it had been hung in his tabernacle. When David saw it his eager eyes shone, and the memory of that great day came to him. It revived his confidence. Ahimelech, seeing the look in his eyes, offered it to him. It was a huge weapon, yet with it David had cut off Goliath's head. When Ahimelech took it down from the wall David gladly accepted it, for in the trees, not far off, he saw Doeg the Edomite peering at them with beady eyes.

On David's flight from Nob, Doeg hurried to Gibeah and told Saul that Ahimelech had befriended David. Saul, in fierce anger, order Doeg to destroy all he found at the little city. Doeg in evil exaltation returned to Nob. There on that peaceful, sacred hill, in the quiet morning, among the shrieks of the women whom he did not spare, with his herdsmen

he slew fourscore and five priests, killing in the defenceless little place men, women and children—all save Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, who secretly fled to David.

Abiathar remained with David through all the years to come—almost to the end of his life, as his trusted friend. He brought with him the ephod,* with the urim† and thummim‡ and remained as David's priest.

In the valley of Elah stood the ancient Canaanite city Adullam, circled by wadys and defiles. Here David's brothers, Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, Nethaneel, Raddai and Ozem and his kinsfolk who had fled from Bethlehem, joined him, and notably his three nephews, Joab, Abishai and Asahel, sons of his sister Zeruiah, and Amasa, son of his sister Abigail.

David, anxious for his parents, went secretly to Bethlehem and brought Jesse and Judith after a hard journey across the plains to a place called Mizpeh§ in the blue mountains of Moab. When they entered Mizpeh in the early morning, travel-worn yet in good spirits, the Moabites with curious looks in their eyes watched them come. David had never been in Mizpeh, but his father knew the way to the palace, which stood on a little eminence. It was a large building and on its roof the flag of Moab flew—green with a crescent moon engraved. Judith's eyes lighted at sight of the flag, for to her it meant safety. They were homeless, having fled from Bethlehem, and somehow here she felt they might be safe. When they came to the palace the Moabite King with all his courtiers round him received them in the open court. By name David was well known to them all, and his saving of Israel was like a star in the sky of Judah.

With his tall captains round him, gorgeously robed, Macon

* Ephod = the robe of a high priest.

† Urim = a mystic ornament worn by a Jewish priest.

‡ Thummim = a mysterious symbol worn on the breastplate of the Jewish high priest.

§ There is a Mizpeh in Benjamin.

the King came forward and pleasantly welcomed them. He first spoke to Jesse and Judith and then he turned to David.

"Our people and thine have long fought, David, but between thee and me is no war. In this city thy father and mother shall be safe."

The people of the court cheered and waved their weapons —a sight to ravish the eyes of David's brothers, who gazed round them gladly. They all had Moabite blood in their veins.

David bowed low. "O King, thou hast given the ancient welcome to thine own. They are safe within thy walls."

David's father and mother turned thankfully to him. David said: "Ye shall have peace here."

Jesse looked tenderly at him. "Mayst thou find peace in Israel!" Judith, his mother, in deep gratitude said: "Kiss me, Davy! Davy!"

David embraced her before Macon and the court and all the people, and then he turned to his brothers.

"Will ye stay or will ye come with me, Eliab?"

"As Hebrews we shall come with thee. These of Moab are our kinsfolk, but thou art our brother." Eliab bowed to the King.

Nethaneel growled. "We must fight with thee for refuge."

Raddai said: "We go because we love thee, David," and he frowned at Nethaneel.

"We shall be ever with thee," said Ozem.

"I am glad. Here at Mizpeh our father and our mother are safe. At Adullam we shall abide."

The King of Moab gave them a banquet. Yet a few men in the court were surly, though they hid their moodiness. The King took the hands of Jesse and Judith and bade David and his brothers farewell to the cheers of his people—save for the few, and they afterwards made trouble.

So through the night David and his brothers returned to Adullam in safety.

Gradually disaffected people from Judah and even from

Israel came to him. They were all brave fighting men with grievances against Saul and his government. Some had been robbed of their homes, some had committed crimes, some had been drawn by the spirit of adventure, and all had been drawn by David's inspiring personality and handsome presence. He welcomed them all warmly. Every man felt, though he came with others, that David had singled him for welcome. David put them all under Joab, his brave fighting nephew, and he himself joined in the training. Food was here in plenty, and they felt themselves growing stronger every day.

At length David decided to quit Adullam, whose people feared destruction like those of Nob, and he went to the forests of Hareth on the edges of the hills of Hebron. His followers doubted the wisdom of leaving the mountain district where they could secure safety when pursued. But David's mind was his own and he convinced the four hundred that all would be well. Therefore they took refuge in the forest that extends from the hills of Judah to the Dead Sea.

Saul lived in agitation at Gibeah. He knew that David had fled from Ramah and Nob, and also that he had left Adullam and had gone to the wilderness of Hareth, and it angered him. His wife Ahinoam, his concubine Rizpah, and his family could not keep him in good humour or divert his mind from David. One day in the open space before the palace he said to his servants: "Ye all have conspired against me. Even my son Jonathan makes league with David, son of Jesse."

Saul's servants shook their heads protesting, and Abner, who had heard Saul's words, led him to a carob tree near the palace and said: "No conspiracy is against thee, Saul. Thou art greater in stature than all in thy kingdom, and if thy soul were as great thou wouldst know that none conspires. David's hand is not against thee."

There was a natural justice and uprightness in Abner. He feared none, not even the King.

Saul turned on him in anger. "Israel cannot have two leaders. I am the anointed of Jehovah!"

"Ay, but in Bethlehem David was anointed also. When thy work is done, he shall lead the people into the fields of conquest and peace. As for Jonathan, by throwing dust on thy son, thou throwest it on thyself. Thy javelin has been raised against him. It was raised against me—against many!"

Saul's foot stamped the ground. "By the life of God, thou art my father's brother's son or I would slay thee, Abner."

"Nay, I shall lead thee to happier days. Other generals fight, but none is so free from ambiton as I. I would only serve thee and Israel. See, I kneel, I am thy friend, thy faithful subject."

After a moment of inward struggle Saul, stretching a hand, lifted Abner up. "We will fight the Philistines and all others of our foes, Abner." Then he turned to his captains and with a smile waved his hand.

Over at Choresh, in Judah, Jonathan came to David's camp. When David saw him coming, he ran forward, his face shining and they embraced. Jonathan was taller than David and at heart a finer man, but David was to go a hundred times as far and do a thousand times as much, and be bigger in the far off end. David's ruddy face glowed with colour, his eyes danced with life, and his thick black hair shone in the sun.

"Jonathan, thy blood is not my blood, but we are one in soul and spirit."

"Yes, we are one in spirit, David. I have seen the greatness in thee since thou didst defeat Goliath—that day thou didst save Israel."

"On that day thy brother linked us together in a covenant, and while life lasts it shall not be broken by me."

Jonathan's brave, selfless face took on a distant, abstracted look seldom seen in the face of man. He had a fearless personality. He had saved his father's army and defeated the

Philistines at Michmash. Ever he had been in the forefront of Saul's fightings and yet Saul's javelin had been aimed at him. Jonathan, who was by instinct brave and by practice a warrior, had no ambition for ruling. To retire to his farm and spend his days in his vineyards and with his sheep and few cattle was his wish. He was far removed from all sordid things and he had a soul that dwelt in higher spheres. The light in his eyes was like that of the farthest star—peaceful and steady and permanent.

He solemnly said to David: "The pledge we made is ever in my mind. Thy spirit is mine. We are both of the inner breed. Thou wast descended from Rahab who saved the Jews under Joshua. My father comes from Joshua and my mother from Abraham. We are not outcast children of the desert like Ishmael who founded Edom and became famous. He was strong and great as a fighter, but I am for peace. Ishmael and I are two prongs of a fork that stretch far and never meet. As for thee, David, thou must fight for Israel. That is thy destiny. It is not mine."

"Truth is on thy lips, my brother. Doeg, the evil man, came from Edom. He will do harm to Israel. Thy mind drinks from the cup of Kish, not of the desert cup that fed Ishmael. Thine is the cup of peace, his was the cup of war."

Jonathan smiled at David. "I am for peace, but I live now by war, as does my father. Yet it is not my will."

David spoke resolutely. "We must fight for Israel, Jonathan. It is so ordained."

Jonathan looked sadly at him and shook his head in negation. "Time has few curtains for me, David—it will not be long. When I am gone, be good to my only son. He is young." He looked into David's eyes steadily. "Though a fugitive now, thou shalt be King, and I am glad that thy queen will be my sister Michal."

David's face lighted and he spoke warmly. "Michal—I sent her to Naioth, so she should not bear the dangers of

my fugitive life, but I cannot live without her longer, and now she shall share the perils of my path."

"Thou wilt be King, thy path will be hard, thy fightings great. Thou must strike hard, David, and in coming days thou wilt. Thy deeds of glory, thy sins of darkness and the love behind will be light to distant ages."

"My arm is for Jehovah and I shall strike for him and for this land I love. I see not the distant ages, but I see the hills of Bethlehem!" His eyes shone, his face was lifted up.

David followed the eyes of Jonathan round the camp. Laughter at last came to his lips. "Thou seest here the off-scourings of the people, but they shall be the bright polish of our deeds." He gripped Jonathan by both arms. "I love thy father Saul. I would serve him till his day is done."

"Oh, that thou and I could serve him together, David!"

David stood unmoving, then the passionate emotion fled and he said: "Come, eat with me, my brother."

As they went towards David's tent, the smiling soldiers stretched hands in greeting, and music came from a little group with kinnors and lutes, and their voices rang out pleasantly:

"And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase."

There was brought to them at the table olives, figs, raisins, dates and honey, lentils, peas and toasted bread in round cakes. Cakes of fine flour, mixed with oil, had been made. As was the custom, the meat was a fatted calf which had been prepared for Jonathan as David's guest. Jonathan tore off a strip of the flesh, dipped it in oil and ate it with olives.

At last they were startled by a shrill wail from groups of people, like the quavering voices of owls. It swelled, wavered, dropped, then died away, like the moaning of the wind at sea. The prophet Micah says: "For this will I wail and howl. I will go stripped and naked. I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches."

They saw women beat their breasts, dishevel their hair and throw dust upon their heads and faces, and their loose robes were torn. They waved their arms above their heads, shrieking and striking with their nails at their faces and uncovered bosoms. They sang weirdly:

"O my master, O my glory, O my pride, O my strength, O camel of the house. Alas for thee!"

David and Jonathan got to their feet. David summoned an officer and questioned him, and he answered: "Behold, a man-slayer killed by the brother of the man he slew."

David turned to Jonathan. "An ill ending for our happy meeting."

Jonathan broodingly said: "Death and life are ever side by side. In life and death is the fate of man."

David did not reply at once. Jonathan's words struck deep. He shook his head sadly. "Come, let us look upon the dead man."

The lamentations grew greater, and through the acacia, the terebinth, the fir and the cedar trees the voices surged like waves of the sea. David and Jonathan found the body under the trees. Jonathan lifted up the cloth from the dead man's face.

When he saw the face David started. "This was one from Bethlehem. I remember him. He loved, and loving greatly, fell. Deceived, he dropped a stone of great weight upon the head of his rival and fled from the justice of his fellow men. The hands of all were against him. Cover up his face. His work is done. He gave his life, and now he knows!" He looked up at the sky. "He knows what we can never know till we have followed him. We know not of that life beyond—whether it has conscious action, or if we sink to an unwaking rest."

Jonathan said softly and dreamily: "We shall live beyond this life. Abraham and Moses are still in the lives of our people. Their voices are calling us from the far places." He pointed to the dead man. "The hereafter is revealed to him."

David gazed at the motionless figure at their feet, then he said: "There shall be no more the beat of pulse within those veins, but his soul shall live in the eternal world."

So Jonathan had taught even the man "after God's own heart." They turned and left the dead man, arm in arm. Suddenly they came upon a camel that had seized with its teeth one who had injured it. It had shaken him and thrown him among the brambles and thorns. David sombrely shook his head. "A camel never forgets an injury."

The camel, with head erect and disdainful nose, chewing its cud, passed on. They turned the man over; he was not dead. His face was scratched and his clothes were torn; he was insensible.

"He will live," said David. They walked on in silence brooding on their talk together. They passed admiring soldiers, and many gazed kindly after Jonathan.

And so under the carob trees with the wailing for the dead and the gay song of the birds in their ears they stood to say farewell in the light of the setting sun.

"We shall meet again," said David.

Jonathan raised his eyes with a troubled look. "In this world?"

"On earth or in the world to come. So let it be," said David, and they embraced.

CHAPTER XIV

JERAD THE PHILISTINE

AMONG those who went with David to the Judean hills was one whom David suspected of not being a Hebrew. After Jonathan had gone, David saw a man dressed in the robes of a Jew who moved among his fellow-soldiers with a placidity not Jewish, and with a slimmer carriage. The acutely sensitive leader watched him. He

felt Jerad, the man, to be a Philistine spy. He was young, good-looking, alert of eye and watchful. It was not David's way to give confidence to anyone. He lived his own life independently, save for the prophets of God. No one but Jehovah influenced him in any decision. He had a mind open and receptive, but he was determined and resolute, with a self-will free from the meaner attributes of man.

It was on the evening of the day succeeding the funeral—the day of the man's death—that Gila, the wife of Nethaneel, arrived with her two daughters. Where the younger girl came by her beauty it would be hard to say, for her father was not handsome, and her mother had a look of one who had travelled a hard path and had little in life to cheer her. Nethaneel was the least pleasing of all David's brothers, the most difficult to placate, apparently the most unreasonable in his judgments.

David welcomed Nethaneel's wife and her two daughters, and he saw Jerad's eyes blaze with interest. Jerad was near an olive tree, and David realized that into this camp a spirit of romance had come. Undoubtedly the man was not a Jew —and he was enamoured of a Jewish girl!

Leah was slim, black-haired and black-eyed, with a look of the dreamer. In character she could go far, but her hands showed the spirit of the adventuress. She was not more than seventeen, but she showed a mind as old as the Judean hills. It belonged to the profound story of Jewish life, and instinctively she felt the presence of Jerad. Her eyes suddenly stood still and she stared straight before her. Even her father's gruff greeting did not draw her from the dream.

David, who was giving orders to Joab, his nephew, as to the training of his men, kept his eye alert for this romance. He saw Leah turn slowly from her father and mother and meet the eye of Jerad. A startled look came to her face. Her intuitive spirit realized he was not a Jew, but his handsome exterior and the look of burning adoration he sent made her almost shiver, and she turned her head away.

"Who is the man behind the olive trees?" she said to one of David's bodyguard, and the reply was: "Jerad of the tribe of Reuben."

"Jerad of the tribe of Reuben!" she said, and a satirical smile played at her lips. Like David, she was not prone to seek confidence or to give it.

There is nothing more beautiful than sunset and night in Palestine, especially in the Judean hills. There the pines, the fir, the cedar, the olive, the terebinth flourish and the sky so blue, sprinkled with stars, somehow seems very near and the moon rises late.

David sat alone in his tent, brooding and realizing that for him and his band there were troubled days ahead. Food was to be had, for there were goats and sheep in the camp and the farmers provided milk, and there were plenty of dates and many cattle and camels, and all through the hills nearby were farmers, who willingly yielded their produce to David and his warlike band. On one thing David was insistent—that there should be no robbery of the farms. He paid for all he got, and if he had not cash he gave his word, with uplifted hand, and there was none in all the tribes of Israel and Judah but believed in him—his honesty, his fidelity, his patriotism. While many farmers would have killed him because he was the foe of the King, or rather because the King was his foe, yet they believed in the man. His hand was never against his own people—only against the Philistine, the Moabite, the Ammonite, the Edomite, the Amalekite, and all the tribes of foreign birth bordering the Holy Land. Chiefest of these foes were the Philistines. They had originally come from Crete. They had handsome presence, were tall and powerful and had instruments of war which would go far, strike hard. They had seldom been defeated, though Samuel had defeated them and had set up a stone at Ebenezer called the Stone of Help. This defeat they had never forgotten, and never could forget. By nature they were a

heathen people and every one of their cities had its own god. The Philistines were in every town of Judea, never many in number, but sufficient for a warning, even a menace, to the people. Outwardly they were civil, but cruelty marked their dark purposes.

As David sat in his tent with only the light of a candle, he saw his course of action. Saul would try to slay him, but he had unshakable faith, and during his long life his faith in Jehovah never wavered. His tent stood higher by some twenty or thirty feet than all the rest of his camp, and he looked out at the twinkling fires by the tents. He felt as he did when a shepherd boy in the hills, strong-hearted, buoyant of spirit, fearless of consequence. He had moved far since those days, but the boy was ever present in him and would be to the last day of his life. His body was iron and steel, his heart like the healthy juice of the grape.

The tents of David's brothers were near his own. Nethaneel had two tents, one for himself and his wife, and the other for his two daughters.

As David looked towards the tents of his brothers, he was conscious of a figure near to the cedar trees, watching, and he guessed it was Jerad. Then he saw Leah come from the tent next to Nethaneel's. She stood with hands clasped, looking at the sky. She had a dress with long loose sleeves, but there was nothing on her head, and her deep black hair was like the canopy of a happy tent, for underneath it were shining eyes and face and proud and tender lips.

As she looked at the sky she murmured to herself and none heard the words, for all the soldiers were sleeping round her.

"Life's greatest secret has come to me." She trembled as she said this. "It is like a sword at my heart, but it is balm at my lips." Her hands clasped close. "Yet, if he were a foe of my people—what should I do?"

At that moment Jerad came slowly forward. She raised

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a hand as though to push him back. He came now so near that he could almost touch her. Her eyes suddenly blazed.

"Thou art not a Jew!" she said, scarcely above her breath.

He bowed his head. "I am a Philistine."

"Thou art a spy!"

"It was so ordered, and I came to be near thee."

"When didst thou see me before?"

"At Bethlehem. Thou wert with thy mother in the market-place, and bought a dove. I dared not speak then, for thou wert the niece of the greatest Israelite." He reached out his arms. "I came as a spy, but naught of the doings here shall go to my general. Thou hast conquered me. I would give my life for thee. To thee belong great things; to me belongs naught unless by thy will."

She would not let him see that what he said touched her inmost soul. She lowered her eyes. He was a heathen, his god was Baal, her God was Jehovah.

"By the raising of my hand thy life would be as naught. One cry before thou hadst time to kill me would bring my people on thee. The doom of a spy is death."

He folded his arms and bowed his head. "Life without thee is naught. If thou sendest me to death I will gladly go."

She looked slowly round the camp and her eyes fell on David's tent. She said: "It is my duty to tell of thy presence."

"Then it is mine also, and I will go to thy uncle."

He turned as though to go to David's tent, but she instantly said: "I will not go, and neither shalt thou. There must be time to think."

They were in the shadow of the fir trees now and none had seen them meet save David. "If I told my uncle he would have thee burned to death."

Jerad smiled bitterly. "What is life without thy love? It is but the dust from the hoof of a camel." He suddenly fell upon one knee, and spread out his hands—"Without thee, let

them hang me, or burn me at the stake. By the gods of Baal and Ashtaroth, I love thee."

Her fingers trembled, then they clenched at her side. "Thou and thy race are foes of my people. Before I speak, get thee gone—get thee gone."

He rose slowly, with radiance in his eyes. "Tonight thou wilt not speak."

She turned from him and fled back swiftly to her tent.

Inside her tent Leah looked at her sleeping sister as one might upon a human being a thousand miles away, for they were far removed from each other, in thought, in spirit and in temperament. Miriam had a commonplace nature. Leah had a touch of genius as David had it in full measure. She sat at her sister's feet, her head in her hands, still, but shaken in spirit, for Jerad had moved her as she had never been moved, and he was of the foes of her people. Her soul was disturbed. She knew the man loved her, and it angered her that she should have been merciful to him. She had spared him tonight, but what would she do tomorrow? Her home at Bethlehem had been broken up, her family were penniless, they were exiles in the hills, they had no home. The tragedies of life had cut deep, and now had come this most sardonic tragedy of all—the love of a foe of her people. Suddenly she fell upon her knees.

"O God of my fathers, teach me, teach me what to do." Long time she prayed.

David in his tent had seen the meeting of Leah and Jerad and his heart was troubled. He knew the soul of the girl was with her people, but love had ere this destroyed loyalty and patriotism. It was hard for David to make up his mind. The man Jerad must die, of course—and then? He must speak with the girl before Jerad was sent to his grave. He walked up and down before his tent in anxiety, and came at last to a decision. He turned and went into his tent, and his mind was at peace.

CHAPTER XV

MICHAL COMES

DAVID stayed in the wilderness of Ziph and Saul pursued him, but the shepherd of the hills with a far smaller force constantly escaped. Meanwhile David sent Abiathar, the priest, and Abishai, his nephew, to bring Michal from Samuel's house at Ramah, where she had doubtful sanctuary from her father.

When these two came to Ramah, Samuel spoke. "Man and wife should be together. Michal is not wholly safe here—we are watched by spies. I will send for her."

Abiathar raised a hand and smiled at Samuel. "Michal is as the sun and evening star to David. A hundred times his life has been in danger but the hand of Jehovah hath saved him. His sword is ever against the foes of his native land, and he evades a fight with Saul. He is loved by all who serve him."

Michal entered, and seeing the messengers her quick mind understood, and her eye lighted.

"Wilt thou not cheer and comfort David, Michal?" said the prophet.

Michal's golden hair and brown eyes were in the glow of the morning. "Do I go to him?"

Samuel inclined his head.

To her lips came a tender smile. "My heart rejoices." She looked at Abiathar and Abishai. "Will you two then take me to him?"

Abishai replied. "That is why we have come. I am David's cousin. He longs for thee."

Michal took Abishai's head in her hands and kissed him on the cheek. "I love those who love David."

"We shall be lonely here, but it is Jehovah's will." Samuel raised a hand in blessing, and they made ready to go.

So, upon a mule, Michal passed from the hill of Ramah,

to the cheering of the students and their chanting, and they made their way by night across plains and through the hills, with her clothes in a neat bundle behind her, Abiathar and Abishai walking by her side.

They could see the lights of Saul's palace at Gibeah, and Abishai said: "By the will of God we shall come safely to David. Thy married life began with joy and peril. It will have peril and joy to the end." Michal gently stroked the neck of the mule. Sadly shaking her head to herself she said: "I am David's first love. Great men have many wives, and even David may. Yet, whatever comes, David will heed me to his last hour!" She drew herself up on the mule proudly. Her prophetic soul spoke here and her eyes brooded on the dusk.

There was tragedy in Michal's eyes but her lips smiled, and Abiathar, who had watched her much, said: "Thou hast the forward look, my daughter. Abide thy fate. All shall be well."

Michal did not answer, but she smiled at Abiathar. She gazed soberly round her. They could now see the hill of Mizpeh, also Anatoth, Beeroth, Beth-horon and in the distance Jerusalem and the hills above the valley of Elah where David had slain Goliath. The light deepened, the hills closed in around them, the smell of the pines and cedars and soft herbs, and the buzzing of insects came to them. In some danger they walked warily past the troops of Saul, but yet in peace, and after three days they came unto the wilderness of Ziph. When they slept at night, Michal dreamed of David, and Abishai slept near her little tent of olive branches and cedar leaves which he and Abiathar had built. At length they passed Hebron where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah and Leah were buried, and here they paused and kneeling prayed beside the tombs. "O father Abraham, let thy spirit speak for us," Michal prayed.

At last at David's camp Michal halted her mule for a moment. Her hand went to her heart. "When the door

of his tent opens, I shall see my lord's face!" Her eyes shone with gladness.

Arrived at the tent of David, he hastened forth. She dismounted.

"Michal—Michal!" he said, and drew her close, while Abiathar lowered his head and Abishai smiled and turned away.

"My heart's grace to ye both, Abiathar and Abishai," said David.

Inside David's tent where Michal unpacked her bundle, David watched her moving gently and swiftly. He said at last: "Michal——!"

She turned burning eyes upon him. "What wouldst thou, my lord?"

"I pray thee, kneel at my feet."

With shining eyes she knelt. Under his gaze her face tenderly suffused. "Oh my beloved lord!" she said.

He stroked her cheek. "Michal, I love thee. While thou wert at Ramah thou wert yet ever near me! But I did not bring thee, for there would be peril for thee! But the families of my brothers have come and other women and so I sent for thee. Thou art here and my heart is glad. I have far to go. Dangers are in the way! Life will be hard for thee, Michal."

She looked up with a smile. "All life were hard without thee, David, all life with thee is good."

"I love thy father, yet he has tried to kill me, but Jehovah hath rescued me—Saul's javelin shall not take my life; it belongs to the people of Israel. The Philistines have gathered a great army and are marching on Saul now--they are the ablest of all our foes!"

She smiled and kissed his knee. "My father Saul is the people's man, but thou art God's, David. Jonathan worships thee."

David leaned over and took his harp. After a moment of reverie his fingers played softly and he sang:

"My brother and my friend! Into thee, Jonathan, hath Jehovah poured the balm of Heaven; thy soul is filled with eternal peace. I have a sacred covenant with thee and my soul is linked with thine. Beautiful art thou in life. When our travel is done we shall rest in the inns of God. By the banks of the heavenly Jordan we shall be glad. Peace will then be forever with us—peace!"

While the notes poured into the soft dusk, Michal stared with shining eyes into the brooding night.

"David! O David!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI

DOEG THE EDOMITE

FOR a long time David and his fugitive troops remained in the hills of Ziph, a plateau that stretches towards the Dead Sea. It is surmounted on the east by a range of cliffs rising abruptly at the shores of the Dead Sea to a height of two thousand feet. Here David stayed with Michal and his fugitive troops while they were increasing by deserters from Saul's army and by men from Israel who believed in David's star and were all of genuine character, energy and force. Under Joab they were powerfully trained, and behind all was the meditative genius of David driving everyone about him into the path of duty.

All this time King Saul sought to capture them, but failed. At length David, ever ready to avoid collision, reached the opposite side of a great gorge called "Cliff of Division," and Saul, with a large body of troops, divided his forces and prepared to beset both ends of the pass. Escape would have been hopeless but for the intervention of the Philistines.

At the critical moment a messenger came to Saul. His name was Guni. "God save thee, King of Israel! I have seen the King of the Philistines over a great army, and they

are marching against Gibeah. Others have come, but my mule was swift and I give thee the truth."

Saul looked out towards the pass where David was, then turned towards Gibeah. The protection of his palace was now his chief thought. He gazed proudly over his forces, and he had three thousand men. He looked at Guni and said: "How great is the army of the Philistines?"

Guni said: "Four thousand, O King, and they are better armed than we, as they have always been, but we——"

Saul interrupted him—"But we have better men and stronger hearts and we fight for liberty." He drew his vast frame together and raised an arm. "Though twice our number, yet will I fight them to free myself from their overlordship. The people of God should not be subject to a heathen race."

He summoned Abner, who had heard all Guni had spoken. "David was in my power, Abner. I would have smothered him, but the Philistines are on us. We cannot fight David now, but a time will come soon. Summon the musicians and the singers, and we will march to make the gods of the Philistines of their every city as rubble on the beach of the sea of Jehovah. We will march to the gates of oppression and beat them down. I will lead my men to the conquest of these devils."

Abner's face lighted. He had the gift of leadership, and was free from littleness of soul. "Thy three thousand men are twice that number, King of Israel, for behind them, nay, before them, is thy iron hand and thy valiant heart."

Saul turned towards his palace, and Doeg faced him. In Doeg's face were bitterness and malice. He had heard of the gathered army of the Philistines and knew the end of David was delayed. In his ugly soul he hated this, and with vision like that of the witch of Endor he foresaw David's escape from death. He had been the tool of this powerful but evil King, and a hundred times at night he had foreseen when he could plunge his knife into the body of David. Like

all evil spirits, he hated the good, and to him David was the best man in all the world, and therefore his foe.

Saul looked towards David's camp on the long ridge of Ziph and he said: "Doeg, I had him there!" He stretched his great arm and his fingers closed. "But the heathen hath come between—the day of my triumph over David is not yet."

Something like a sneer came to Doeg's face. "He is thy daughter's husband and she is with him, King of Israel."

A sudden fury seized Saul. "Thou must capture her, Doeg. With her away from him, the end were easier. Canst thou serve me in this?"

Doeg shook his head in doubt. "What thou wouldst have me do, strikes deep for Fate, but it is the one thing for me. By all the gods I will do it, for the greater danger the greater deed." He stretched a hairy hand, like a tiger's claw. "This hand will lead her to thee, or it will be cut off by those who defend her. As thou marchest against thine overlord, O Saul, I march to destroy thine other overlord, David."

Saul's body trembled with rage. "How darest thou! I have no Jewish overlord. Get thee from my sight, thou son of Belial. Get thee gone!"

An evil grin came to Doeg's face. "Something tells me that though I seize thy daughter Michal, I shall not slay the future King of Israel—not yet." So saying he fled from Saul's presence, and with six herdsmen journeyed towards the place where David's camp was.

From the pass at Ziph, David saw the troops of Saul move swiftly towards Gibeah by way of Hebron, Mamre and Giloh. He sent for Michal. "See, thy father's army marcheth from this pass. Surely God is good, for with my one thousand I could not have escaped his three thousand. The hand of the God of Abraham hath been with me, Michal."

"It shall always be with thee, David, my dear lord."

"I leave thee here, for I must find at Engedi, which is full of caverns, a secure refuge. The spring there comes

from the side of a mountain about six hundred feet above the Salt Sea and forms an oasis where there are marvels of growth and food will be plenty. Thou shalt remain here. I go with Asher, Shaphat and Zin to find a great cave where we can make our home and find caverns for our hosts."

Michal's face clouded. "Let me go with thee."

David firmly shook his head. "Nay, thou must not go."

Michal's face turned white. A strange brooding look came into her eyes. "A fear has come upon me, my Lord. I will stay because thou commandest, but danger is before me —some dark thing in my path."

David took her head in both his hands. He kissed her fondly. "Have no fear, for behind us is the will of God. He has saved us today from thy father, and He will save thee when I am gone. Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered, as they have been scattered today. I go now to Eliab, and hither Joab comes."

Joab's face was alight. "Master, O master, all is well! The Philistine marches against Saul, and thou art safe."

David nodded. "It is so. I go now to Engedi, and Michal I leave in thy care."

He hastily told Joab of his journey to Engedi with three men who were to go with him. Joab saw Michal's downcast look, her face was that of one who foresaw evil. He liked it not. "My life is at thy service, sir. Shall I bring other women?"

"Aye, bring Leah, daughter of Nethaneel."

Michal raised her head as though to protest, but she did not. Between her and Leah there had never been good feeling, for Leah was more beautiful, abler and less understood than anyone in all the camp.

David left Michal and Joab and went to the tent of Eliab, and Eliab said: "Thy plan is good, but take me with thee."

"I will take thee, Eliab."

"There are Nethaneel and the others."

"None save thee. Thou art my eldest brother and thou alone shalt go."

As he left Eliab's tent, he came upon Leah. Her face lighted with a smile, for there was that between them which none other of David's family had. She had a touch of genius, and her smile was like that in David's eyes, the light of a great patriotism and of the inner soul of Jewish life.

He clasped her hands. "Leah, thou and I have far to go. I trust thee."

That night towards morning Michal waked and looked at David. He slept the sleep of the just and healthy and the long lashes of his eyes lay upon his ruddy cheek, and in the breaking light of morning Michal could see his face. She leaned over it and shook her head in sorrow.

"O my dear lord," she whispered, "why dost thou leave me here alone? I would go with thee in hardship and in pain—but thy will, not mine! Dread makes cold my heart—but not to thee!" Her eyes stared before her. "Dangers await me—I know not what they are!"

She leaned over and tenderly touched his lips with hers. He moved in his sleep, but did not waken. Sleep under the Hand of Jehovah was upon him. His eyelids quivered but did not open. His black hair was like the glossy wing of a black butterfly. His face was perfect in its repose, and there was a smile at his lips. It was the great moment of Michal's life. Never again would she see him as he was now, never again would she be the only woman in his life, and in her tremulous heart she knew it. She had not the brains or the power or the sensitive thought of Leah, but she had a deep and loyal soul. She gazed out towards the dawn, and the sinking moon and the bright stars gave light for her to see. Daughter of a king of the family of Kish, she was humbly but nobly born, destined to play the greatest part in David's life that any woman played until the sin of Bathsheba should poison his future and break him into fragments of repentance. There would be other women, but she was his first love, and this

was to be their second great parting. Though her eyes wept not, her soul was full of tears. She stretched her hands in blessing over his face, then lay down beside him, and she did not sleep again.

David, with Eliab and the three men, hastened away to great cheering, for the camp knew that Saul's army had no power over them, and they felt the Hand of God had stretched to save them. They had no fear of death, but they dreaded shame, and for them a possible defeat by Saul with his great army would have been shame and humiliation which Jehovah had not permitted. As Saul had gone towards Gibeah with the singing and dancing of his men, so David went to Engedi by the Dead Sea, and all the shouting of his little host of a thousand and the dancing and the singing followed him as he travelled swiftly.

His girl-wife watched him until the trees swallowed him up. Then she turned and before her stood Leah. Leah looked at Michal and understood. She knew by instinct the thoughts in Michal's mind. Leah was younger, but she was a hundred years older in knowledge of the essential facts of life. Without a word they took each other's hands. Inside David's tent they gazed at each other; at this moment a new feeling for Leah came to Michal, and then arms reached out and they were drawn to each other's breasts.

Michal with shining eyes spoke. "Thy face is like that of David. In it is the same distant beautiful look not wholly of this world. I love thee, Leah."

Leah did not reply at once. There was ever in her the strife between the right thing and the wrong. She would greatly struggle and greatly sin, but always would follow the conquest of herself. All through David's life, watchful, patient, impulsive, she would play a part, not in the forefront of the stage, but in the wings thereof.

They sat and in silence held each other's hands, and to them came Abiathar the priest. The father and family of

Abiathar had been slain by Doeg, and he alone survived. He looked at the two with benevolent, but incomplete, understanding.

"Children, come into the open day. Mix with the people, they are mad with joy. Smile, for in smiling there is joy for others."

The two women came out, and they were soon singing and dancing with the people. The soldiers circled round them in great numbers, and among them was Jerad whose eyes sought those of Leah, but she kept hers turned from him. As far as sight could reach were the rocky yet fertile hills. There was the tinkling of the bells of the camels and the soft bleating of the sheep. Flowers were in the wood and birds sang gaily. Lizards ran here and there and conies peeped from the shrubbery.

Jerad, failing to meet the eyes of Leah, stole away among the trees. "I am but a small lamp in an empty pitcher. She does not look at me, yet I keep faith in her. No word of this army shall go to my people." At last he swung round and joined the shouting crowd again, and now Leah gave him a swift smile.

Meanwhile Doeg and his men were coming from the army of Saul. Arrived secretly within arrow-shot of the Israelite camp, they undid food from their scrips and ate savagely as was their wont. It was the evening of the day David had gone to Engedi. They came forth and stole softly near to the Jewish camp. Some fires were burning, but there was no light in the tent of David.

To his two herdsmen Doeg said: "Ye shall go with me to yonder tent. We shall take Michal to the palace of Saul. Leah, niece of David, sleeps by herself. She may awake—there is danger! If they rouse the camp——" he made a motion across his throat. "If they sleep on, Michal's mouth shall be smothered by this veil, and I will bear her forth."

He nodded to the two alert, sturdy, rough-handed, bearded

men with small black eyes and shaggy heads. Silently they stole through the trees with feet that made little noise on the soft padded earth. Alone through the dark night, for the moon had not yet risen, the three made their way. They crawled past sleeping soldiers making no sound.

The only sleepless man in all the camp was Jerad. He dared not think what might chance if the Philistines were successful against Saul. He came out into the night and looked up towards David's tent, but in the gloom saw naught.

At that instant Doeg, with his two men crawling carefully, arrived at the door of David's tent. His men sprang upon the guard, stuffed a cloth into his mouth and choked him to death. There was no noise of a struggle, for they were too powerful, and the man lay dead.

Doeg entered the tent softly. The deep breathing of the two women came to his ears, and he stooped over Michal's bed. Her face was turned towards him. Her mouth was slightly open, and with lightning speed he thrust the veil into her mouth and with giant arm drew her and the bedclothes to him and moved out into the night. Leah slept on.

Jews slept in their day clothes and Michal was clad. Some distance from the camp Doeg whispered in her ear: "If thou dost speak I'll have thy life." He took the veil from her mouth.

With angry scorn Michal said: "I know thee, Doeg. I will not cry out, for I know thou wouldst slay me. Had I a weapon I would kill thee."

With Doeg behind her and a herdsman on either side, they arrived at last on the fringe of King Saul's territory, not far off from Gibeah.

Back in the camp of David, Leah waked with the early dawn and looked towards Michal's bed. It was empty. She sprang to her feet and ran to the door. There the guard lay dead, the cloth still in his mouth. Then she understood. With a great cry she waked the camp.

"Michal—Michal is gone! Joab—Joab!" she cried, as

Joab came hurrying forward. "Michal—Michal is gone! She has been stolen!"

Abiathar the priest appeared. Leah fell on her knees before him. "Priest of God, Michal, Michal is gone!"

Among those who deplored the stealing of Michal by Doeg was Jerad the Philistine. He hated such a crime. It seemed monstrous that the wife of David should be stolen by her own father, through Doeg, her father's tool. During the day a man of Judah had come from the camp of Saul, and had said that Doeg had taken her to the palace of Saul.

Jerad heard the wailing and he mourned that Leah should be in such distress. All day she grieved with her family, and Joab cursed himself for not having put a better guard at David's tent. Who could think that such a crime could be committed? And by King Saul! David's married life had been a series of tragedies, ending with this great disaster. Happiness had marked the first days they had spent in the hills of Judah, but that was all ended now. Jerad moved among the soldiers lamenting with them, and he shared in the ritual of wailing.

The next night outside David's tent he found Leah. She looked at him with bewildered eyes, and yet his presence comforted her. Among all the people of Israel, even from Abiathar, she had little comfort. But the sight of this man made her heart beat faster. Yet she could not resist striking him. She said: "Was it thou that stole Michal from this tent? Was it thou?"

His face flushed. "Am I so vile? Am I of the slime?" Anger and disgust were in his tone. "If thou thinkest so, then I will tell thy people who I am and let them slay me."

She relented and said softly: "Thou art not so low, Jerad. It was not thou. In my bitterness I struck at thee. Thou hast an honest soul."

"I am a spy, yet I have not sent away one secret of this camp. If I return without information, my general will slay me. Death here—death there!"

"My heart tells me that David knows the truth. I know not why he spares thee. One cannot read the mind of genius. I dread the blow that will strike him to the heart. He loves Michal beyond all counting!"

Jerad came nearer. He stretched a hand but did not touch her. "David's brothers, their wives, their children mourn, but thou dost mourn more truly. Thou hast Israel's soul in thee. None feels this crime as thou dost. My soul was stricken to see thee suffer so. I love thee with all my soul, Leah! All I am is thine!"

She touched his shoulder and said softly: "Jerad, thou hast helped me. My thoughts will follow thee. Leave me now. I believe thy words. All shall be well. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

"The blessing of Baal be upon thee! The golden light of Ashtaroth give thee light for thy dreams!"

CHAPTER XVII

JONATHAN COMES TO DAVID

DAVID, Eliab and his men explored the district of Engedi. He saw it would make a powerful place of defence or aggression against Saul, because the caverns gave refuge for the men, and the district was favourable as to food for the cattle and themselves. It was a luxuriant area, nine hundred feet above the Dead Sea. He stayed about five days.

The day he left Engedi, and turned back towards Ziph, was clouded and lowering. Up to then it had been bright and sunny and David had felt the stir and vibration of the life of a whole people about him. This morning, however, his spirit saddened. He looked at the Dead Sea. He looked at the far-off hills, at the luxuriance of verdure at his feet, and his spirit dropped more than it had done since he had left

the shepherd's hills at Bethlehem. He had not his kinnor with him, yet his fingers ached to play. It had been left in his camp at Ziph.

To Eliab he spoke: "I know not why, but darkness comes upon my life."

Eliab, with no temperament, but of sturdy build and great vigour, said: "Thou wast always in the clouds or in the Dead Sea. I cannot think with thee, David. Thou art not of the breed of Jesse. Thou standest by thyself."

David nodded. "Jesse was my father, but I come from Boaz and Ruth, and Rahab the brave dark spirit who saved Judah, from whom we are all descended. My lineage is like thine, Eliab, but the valley between us only widens as the years pass. My heart is with my family, but my soul is with the people of Israel, and with its God."

Eliab could not resist a sneer. "To thee the people of Israel are more than thy father and thy mother, thy sisters and thy brothers. Because of thee we have been driven from Bethlehem and our parents are with the King of Moab. We are with thee in thy exile. Our homes are gone. Dost thou think it does not shake us?"

David looked at Eliab with far-seeing eyes and laid a hand on his shoulder. "All my family have lost shall come to them again. Land, home, cattle—all shall be theirs. Eliab, thou hast given me my soul again. The day is dark and I was sad but now my spirit is alight. I return to Ziph where the hand of God has saved me from King Saul. I return——"

He stopped short. He was going to say: "To my wife, Michal," but somehow he could not say it! Without a further word he led the way from the hills of Engedi into the plain towards the plateau of Ziph. All day they travelled and slept that night, and the next morning marched on.

Presently David saw in the thunderous morning Jonathan approaching. As Jonathan hastened towards him, David stopped short, for there was a strange look in Jonathan's face.

For a moment, not far apart, they stood and gazed and the eyes of Saul's son grew dim.

At last he said: "David, my brother! What thou lovest as thine own soul is lost to thee."

David moved forward slowly and with trembling fingers stroked Jonathan's face.

"Michal—Michal is dead!" he said in bewildered, awestruck tone.

Jonathan shook his head. "No. Doeg stole her from thy camp and my father gave her to Phalti the Meholathite. I know not whither she has gone."

David waved his brother Eliab and his men back, then with a face which suddenly had grown twenty years older he said: "Michal, my beloved! Why did I not bring thee with me as thou didst beg? In thy soul was the shadow of this tragedy. Michal—Michal!"

He dropped upon his knees. Jonathan stooped over him. "David, thou shalt live, thou shalt not forget her." He raised an arm. "She shall come again to thee. Time will not destroy thy first love. She shall be in thy heart and soul forever."

David got to his feet. His body straightened. Tragedy slowly went from his face and the haggard look from his eyes, and presently in them shone the deeper light of days to come. He laid hands on Jonathan's shoulders. "Friend of my heart, thou givest me hope again. I return to my army. See, yonder they come from my camp."

Far off they could see men hurrying and David nodded. "It is my men."

Jonathan swung upon him. His face lighted, his lips smiled. "In the end thou shalt prevail, and I shall stand next to thee in Israel."

David looked at Jonathan with prophetic eye. "Jonathan, when I lead Israel, thou shalt not be with me. Something so speaks to my soul." His face took on a far, rapt expression.

Jonathan smiled. "Through thee life means much to me,

David. I know not what other days may bring, but in life and death I am thy faithful friend."

Then he swung from David and hastened down the hill, and David did not try to stop him. Now life seemed bigger than it had ever been. He watched Jonathan till he was lost to view, then grimly he waited the coming of the men from his camp and he beckoned for Eliab and his own men.

To Eliab he said: "Michal, my wife, has been stolen by her father."

Eliab bowed his head: "The waves beat hard against thy shore, David." Something like friendliness was in his eye.

David grasped his hand. "Jehovah draws us nearer, Eliab."

When the soldiers, panting, sent by Joab came and would have spoken, David raised his hand to prevent them.

"I know all. Michal is gone. March on!"

As they marched swiftly on the clouds broke and the sun shone through. David raised his head to the light.

CHAPTER XVIII

ABIATHAR COMMANDS

AT length, after hard travel across the harsh intervening hills and valleys, they drew near David's old encampment. One thing David had learned, that if men must endure hard travels, they must sleep. His brother and the few men with him slept well, but David could not sleep. He paced the moon-lit hills gaining new strength from the starry night and the everlasting whispers that came to him through the trees and across the hills. He could not sleep and yet the quiet night was restful to his body. His mind and soul were awake, and they saw afar, felt deeply, ranged to the uttermost of time and space.

The first great tragedy of his life had come. The crime of Saul had shaken him to the farthest corners of his greatly

loving, greatly daring soul. The future was dim before him, but in his heart was trust in Jehovah.

At last he saw dawn break in its exquisite saffron and soft rosy light, and it seemed to him that this day was opening somehow to greater things.

There came round him his few men, and his brother Eliab watched him closely. But though he seemed lost to their presence, living beyond them, his step was steady, his body was firm, his face was quiet, yet in his eyes was the fire that would never be dimmed till time should cease for him. He raised his head to the rising sun and behind his lips were the words: "Thy hand hath smitten me, but I love Thee and I trust in Thee and Thou wilt guard my ways."

Steadily, tirelessly David advanced with his small group across the stony hills and through the valleys, and so intent was he on getting back to his camp that he would not eat and he did not talk. Eliab and the others followed him and only at Eliab's urgent appeal did David stop. Then he turned and said:

"Forgive me."

He smiled at them and always his smile conquered, and though they were all fatigued they nodded and said: "Do with us as thou wilt."

Then they ate and drank and were refreshed and after an hour passed on their way again. Gazelles crossed their path, squirrels ran here and there and birds flew overhead, but David moved as in a dream between this world and the next. Life was one great laboratory where his soul was being fused. At length they came almost within speaking distance of David's camp, and sentries whom Joab had sent out, armed with spears, saluted silently as they passed.

Suddenly they came out upon the hills, and there swiftly gathered the warriors and their families, weeping and wailing for David's sorrow.

When they saw him, still, steady, pale of face but upright and with shining eyes, a great cheer went up drowning the

cries and lamentations. David stretched out a hand. "Cease wailing, Jehovah hath smitten. I abide His will."

Abiathar the High Priest lifted up his hands in welcome and in blessing, and David said to him: "The hands that at Saul's command slew thy father have carried off Michal."

"When the earth quakes about thee thou standest firm, David."

A curious expression stole into David's eyes. He looked at Abiathar, who was a small, fat man with round face and weak, dark eyes, and his mouth lacked firmness. Of all the priests and prophets he was the least imposing. He had vanity too; his robes were always carefully chosen.

Suddenly David determined to send to Ramah to ask the prophet Gad who had great qualities, was honest, straightforward, persistent and truthful, to come to him. David did not disbelieve in Abiathar, but he believed more in Gad. Abiathar always put the best foot forward, Gad's hand was sometimes like a spear thrust forward at David's tempestuous heart.

David was not tempestuous now. He was cold outwardly, quiet and still. To Abiathar he turned now:

"Thou also hast learned that one must not trust in princes." Then he moved from Abiathar to Joab. "I left her in thy charge, Joab."

Joab bowed his head in grief. "Upon me thy hand should fall. I should have posted more men at her door. I should have guarded the door of her tent myself."

David looked calmly at him. "Thou didst not sin in this—it is the will of God."

There had gathered near him most of his fighting men and their few families, and in front of them all were his brothers and his nephews and Leah and others. He went to his brothers and shook each warmly by the hand.

Turning to Leah, he took one of her hands in both of his but he did not speak a word. Then he smiled at his nephews.

One of the captains of his hosts said: "Thou art lonely now," and his voice choked as he spoke.

David turned and looked at him and then at the others. "Not alone, for ye are with me. Ye are my friends. I am come from the Engedi hills. There we shall find a resting-place and have food in plenty and safety." He turned to Joab again. "Make ready, Joab. We shall go soon."

To the cheers of the soldiers, Joab, with his brothers Abishai and Asahel, moved off among the men, who with great delicacy of feeling in so primitive a camp left David standing alone by the tent where he had lived.

David saw Leah moving off with his brothers and he called to her. She came forward. In her eyes were tears, but her face was ruled to quiet. They entered the tent together. Slowly he looked round it.

"Here I left Michal with thee, Leah. Thou didst love her but thou didst not wake!"

"All night I slept and Doeg crept in and carried her off. I know not why I did not hear him."

"The fingers of God were on thine eyelids. It was His will."

Leah gazed at him with wondering eyes. "Thou hast a soul above most men. Thy courage shall make Israel great."

David raised his eyes over the head of Leah looking into space. "I shall see Michal again and she shall come to me."

Leah's eyes half closed: "Thou liftest up thine eyes to the hills from whence cometh thy help."

David smiled sadly. "That thought came to me as a shepherd lad in our Judean hills."

They sat in silence for some time, and up the hillside came the murmuring of the people and the voice of a singer also—"In all Thy paths is peace; in Thy hands against all foes we shall be safe."

The words came faintly to their ears and David, lifting his head, said gently to Leah. "When didst thou see Jerad last, Leah?"

"Two nights ago."

With darkened forehead David studied her. "Dost thou care for him?"

"He is a Philistine!" Her face hardened.

"I saw your first meeting, and I have watched him since. None knows that I suspect him."

She raised her head. "Thou wert right! At his general's command he came to spy upon thy camp, that he might be near me, but he loved me and he would send no news. He saw me first in the market of Bethlehem and was drawn to me."

"I trust thee as mine own soul. The fate of Israel is as dear to thee as to me. I must learn the will of God. Get thee to thy father's tent, Leah."

She reached out both hands, her eyes shining. "For thy faith I thank thee." Then she turned and left him.

After some days David summoned Jerad. Jerad was startled by the summons but he faced David with quiet boldness. David steadily looked him up and down. "I sent for thee, Jerad, to give thee work to do. Thou wilt bring here Jonathan, the son of the King. There will be much danger, but thou art a brave *Jew*"—he dwelt upon the word looking Jerad firmly in the eyes, but Jerad did not flinch. "Thou wilt be in peril among my foes. If thou dost succeed in this, I will reward thee, Jerad."

Jerad's face was pale but his lips were firm. "I will bring Jonathan, the son of Saul, to thee. I go without fear."

"Thy path is full of pitfalls. May all be well with thee!"

"By the God I worship, I will bring Jonathan."

"Only by thy God Jehovah shalt thou bring him to me!"

David's eyes dwelt serenely on Jerad, and the Philistine did not guess that David knew him for a spy.

With smiling meditation David watched him go.

Jerad started on his way when night had fallen. Leah saw him descend the hills and walked swiftly towards Gibeah. Then she came slowly to David's tent. David saw inquiry in her eyes.

"Jerad has gone among my foes to bring Jonathan to me," he said grimly.

She raised her head firmly, yet with repressed agitation. "He went alone!"

"Better alone than with many. He goes in peril all the way."

Her eyes were steady. "He will bring Jonathan to thee. He has no fear."

David smiled, for this girl had her own reticence, also the touch of genius in him. Greatness was behind the adventure of her fingers and the passion of her eye. He stroked her cheek. She looked at him but did not speak, and she went back to her home, on the way passing Abiathar, who was going hastily towards David's tent.

David was alone and was surprised at his coming. After a moment Abiathar solemnly spoke. "Thou hast far to go—the way is hard in Israel. Jehovah commands thee not to live alone, David."

David stretched a protesting hand. "While life is to me I cannot forget Michal. Am I like a sheep's down blown hither and thither by the wind!"

Abiathar gazed profoundly at him. "Thou needst not forget Michal."

David sat still in reverie, then at last he added bitterly: "It is hard to do. Besides there is no woman here I would marry."

In reproof Abiathar shook his head. "None here, but thou shalt soon meet one who shall be thy wife."

David's eyes suddenly became fixed upon that roof at Gibeah where Michal had first given her life to him. He saw it now and his heart rose up, and his soul's eye looked over the whole of Israel as it had looked that morning.

"God's will be done," he said at last.

Four days later Jonathan came to David's tent and they

embraced. Then Jonathan said: "David, why didst thou send that Philistine for me!"

David's face showed sudden anxiety. "How didst thou know him that, Jonathan?"

"My mind is thy mind. Jerad is a brave man. He was in grave peril a dozen times, but he reached me at last. I brought him safely through my father's army to thy camp."

"Now I realize it is God's will he should stay here."

Then they talked much together, and David told Jonathan his plans.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEATH OF SAMUEL

DAVID and his brothers Eliab, Nethaneel and Raddai left their army and their fastness and came in the late afternoon towards a cave where Saul would likely rest. It was the biggest cavern on that side of Engedi. They could see Saul's army approaching in the evening light, and Saul himself and his sarsaba at the head of his troops. Ishui and Ishbosheth and Melchishua were behind in command of divisions, but Jonathan was not there, and Saul's immense frame showed powerful and dominant in the light of the setting sun. The sunset colours in Palestine are like the most brilliant rainbow with a quality quite their own and with a variety greater than anywhere else in the world. Nowhere are sunrises and sunsets and the glow of the afternoons so striking as in the Holy Land, nowhere does the mystery of the sky seem so deep and strange, so suggestive of life beyond this world.

"See the huge traitor and hellish ruler marching on us, David. He has never kept faith or pledge with thee," so Eliab spoke.

"He is God's anointed and I have no hatred of him."

"He is the broth of hell's kettle," said the surly Nethaneel.

Raddai laughed. "No one knows hell's kettle better than Nethaneel!"

Nethaneel swung on him. "Thou art the imp that stirs the broth, insect!"

"Enough, enough," said David. "Let us look to our safety. Near yonder open cave is where Saul's army will camp. We will watch it arrive and will steal into the cave when we see if it camps there."

Eliab nodded, and they watched the army camp and light their fires for supper. They saw Saul and Abner and his sons eat and drink, and then look round, and Saul pointed to the cave which David had chosen, and Abner nodded. In the dusk David and his brothers stole into the cave and none of Saul's army saw. They hid themselves in the shadows of the place, and at last they saw Saul and Abner enter.

Saul put his head on Abner's shoulder. "I have that scab of Bethlehem at last, Abner. Tomorrow it will be in my hands."

Abner shook his head. "It is no scab, O King, it is the seal that makes thy kingdom safe. I fight for thee, but I love it not. I do my duty—that is all."

"Then do thy duty still, sarsaba!" In anger Saul laid himself down, and placed his spear, the royal symbol, beside his head, and Abner set a cruse of water near; and soon as the sounds of the army ceased they slept.

Nethaneel urged David to slay Saul, but David would not. His brothers would have killed Saul but David forbade them. Then with his own hand he cut off a portion of Saul's skirt.

"Jehovah said He would deliver thine enemy into thine hand that thou mayest do as seemeth good to thee!" so Eliab spoke.

David shook his head in negation and showed the portion of Saul's skirt he had cut off and bade them be still. Then they left the cave silently and went off into the hills.

Saul and Abner knew not of their presence. With the flush of dawn Saul rose and came from the cave. He looked out over the ranges of the Engedi and the Dead Sea. He smiled, for with his three thousand men he had David and his army in his power. He longed to rid the land of David. The hand of God was with him at last. In the distance he saw the robes of David's men here and there, and he gazed gloatingly over his own three thousand.

"At last this danger to Israel is in the palm of my hand!"

His eyes wandered towards Gibeah and Bethlehem and Ramah. Looking towards Ramah his eyes fell, for Samuel was there, and Samuel had declared his fall. Samuel came no more to court. He taught the students in the schools of Ramah and he laid the foundation upon which the future kings of Israel could build. Looking towards Ramah Saul shuddered, for he realized that the old prophet—soldier as well as prophet—was the greatest man in Israel. He had first used his name in summoning the tribes together, and he recalled the last day of his judgeship and the cheers of the people. Saul straightened his gigantic frame.

"I have conquered the Philistines, the Amalekites and the Ammonites. With a strong hand I have led Israel, and the way widens." Then he heard a voice say clearly:

"My lord the King!"

David had walked up softly behind the little hills.

Saul turned and saw David near, stooping with his face to the earth. David looked respectfully and friendly at Saul. "Wherefore hearest thou men's words saying 'Behold David seeketh thy hurt?' Last night the Lord delivered thee into mine hand in the cave. My friends bade me kill thee, but I would not stretch my hand against the Lord's anointed. See the skirt of thy robe in my hand, for I cut it off as thou didst sleep. I have not sinned against thee, yet thou huntest me to slay me."

Confounded, Saul's mouth opened, but no words came,

and Abner touched him on the arm. "Before God, he speaks the truth. A strip of thy skirt is in his hand."

David's voice rose again. "The Lord judge between thee and me. After whom is the King of Israel come out, after whom dost thou pursue? After a dead dog?* After a flea?"

There was satire in the inflection of his voice, but he repented of this and said with softness and firmness: "The Lord therefore judge between thee and me, and deliver me out of thine hand."

Again David bowed his head. He sought no revenge for the stealing of his wife. His soul was bigger than that. Despite the dangers following him through this recreant king, he loved him. He knew that behind his evil deeds was that which had made God call him from the home of Kish to be King, and he had done great things for Israel. The man was a victim of hysteria, his own worst enemy. Disappointment, fear of the revenge of heaven, and enormous vanity were upon him. His soul was as heavy as the sea which shone in their eyes six hundred feet below—the Dead Salt Sea. The greatness in David rose above his own wrongs and the crimes of Saul which had made him a fugitive.

David looked into Saul's eyes, then into those of Abner, and in Abner's he saw the spirit of an honourable man. In the face of Saul he saw the soul breaking its black boundaries and coming into the light. He saw the great frame heave, and these words fell from Saul's lips, brokenly, sadly:

"Is this thy voice, my son David?"

"Even so, my King."

"Thou art more righteous than I, David. Thou hast done me good when I would have done thee evil. The Lord gave me into thine hand and thou didst not kill me; for if a man find his foe, will he let him go well away? Wherefore, Jehovah rewarded thee for what thou hast done this day."

* The dog was ever held in contempt in the Holy Land.

David came nearer. "Come good or ill, though thou wouldst kill me, yet will I not slay thee."

"Behold, I know now that surely the kingdom of Israel shall be in thine hand. Swear now, therefore, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house."

Saul wept, his great body shook, and David, with hand raised high, said: "I will not be King while thou dost live, O Saul, and not by me shall thy life end. If thou leavest me at peace henceforth I will serve thee as I did when I was thy armour-bearer, after I slew Goliath. I am thy servant as I was thy son. Thou hast broken my home and stolen my wife, but I love thee, Saul. No seed of thine shall suffer at mine hand. I pray thee, give me back Michal. She is my wife. Wilt thou give her back to me?"

Saul raised his head and firmly said: "Yea, she shall leave Phalti and return to thee."

Then he turned to Abner: "Go back to Gibeah with my army yonder. I have done with war against this man. We are at peace."

Saul stroked David's face, and the light in David's face was like the dawn, and joy was in him.

"I will not return to thy court. Send Michal to me. I will remain in the hills of Engedi and abide the will of God."

So, at length, they parted and David watched Saul and his Gibborim march over the hills towards Gibeah, and the sun partly behind a cloud was like a vast wheel in the sky.

While these things were forward, Samuel was dying in his home at Ramah. All Israel loved and honoured him, and there were gathered at Naioth the students and the priests and prophets of his school of Ramah.

Samuel lay upon his bed breathing hard. Charah, his wife, and his recreant sons were beside him. He lay as

though sound asleep, but suddenly his eyes opened and saw his wife.

"Charah, thou hast been a good wife in the days I have served the Lord. Since in the house of Eli I became a Nazarite I have served God with truth and faith. In the world to come I will try to bring good to this people I have served so long."

Then he turned to his priestly sons, Joel and Abiah. "Ye have not served Israel well in Beersheba. Ye have been corrupt. Ye have been the foes of David, and Saul pursues David to kill him. But David is the saviour of Israel. He will outlive ye all. When he was here last, ye reviled him and I condemned ye. Like the sons of Eli, ye have brought shame upon my name, yet I forgive all done against me. Stoop and let me kiss the heads of both."

Abiah was troubled by his father's going hence. "My father, thou hast lived more greatly than any prophet since Moses, and though we have sinned, yet we do repent. We pray thee, bless us now."

Samuel drew down their heads and kissed them. Then he raised his hand above them without a word.

His many words had tired him, and his wife leaned down to him. "There is none in Israel but will mourn thee, for thy hand has ever been with the needy, ever against those who would hurt the people thou hast led. Thou didst anoint King Saul. He disobeyed and thou anointedst another, and he has won our hearts."

Samuel raised himself slowly on his bed. "With a million men Saul will not conquer David. While Israel lasts David shall prevail. There will come, far off, after struggles, strifes, losses and captivities, one who shall be called the 'son of David,' and He shall be in all times the everlasting name."

He raised a feeble hand in blessing, but it dropped, and slowly he sank back upon his bed and his spirit passed.

The people in the house and outside wailed, and never had there been greater grief than at the death of Samuel.

All this chanced while David talked with Saul at Engedi, and it seemed that the land grew black and there were thunderings in the sky.

The people of Israel buried Samuel in his own house that day, at Ramah, and wept for him long. He had presided over the people alone after the death of Eli, the high priest, and had been prophet with Saul ever since he began to reign.

Far off in the hills of Engedi, when the news was brought to David, he fell upon his knees and raised his hands. "Now is the great man gone from Israel!"

David looked out of his tent and saw the war flags lowered from the hills by the command of Saul, and Saul's army marching back to Gibeah, their robes shining in the sun.

He moved about among his men, but his spirit was bowed in grief and his eyes ever turned towards Ramah. It seemed to him that with Samuel's passing the sun of Israel was in eclipse and that his own path was darker. Ever had Samuel been where he could find him, and often he had gone to him for counsel. The prophet had been the mainstay of his life, his refuge when all else failed him. At last he took his harp and, with his warriors gathering fast around him, he chanted:

"Honour and majesty didst Thou lay upon Samuel Thy servant, O Lord. Thou gavest him length of days and glory. In Thy presence shall he rest forever. He beheld the wondrous things of Thy law. He kept Thy testimonies and served Thee with a whole heart. Thou wert his strength and song and his salvation. Thou wilt make him glad of Thy countenance. He drove the heathen from Thine inheritance and builded up the power of Thy people Israel. Thy truth endureth forever!"

CHAPTER XX

ABIGAIL

DAVID left the caves of Engedi after Saul's repentance and Samuel's death and in great sorrow for Samuel went down to the wilderness of Paran with his people and his men. There he camped, and the food was not so plentiful at Paran as at Engedi. In his need David turned to Nabal, whose possessions were in Carmel and who lived at Maon. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and David and his men, though in need, had not troubled the shearers nor had any of Nabal's sheep been lost.

David bade ten young men go to Nabal and make request for food. He gave them friendly messages to Nabal and he added this: "Peace to thee and to thy house and all thou hast, and I pray thee, give whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David, the son of Jesse."

Nabal answered the ten: "Who is David, who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?"

Then the ten angrily returned to the camp, and when David heard their tale he said unto his men: "Gird ye on your swords," and four hundred of them went up with him. All men were welcome to any home in the land and the rich gave to all who asked. Nabal had denied the soul of Israel. He had broken the law of hospitality.

One of the shearers spoke to Abigail, Nabal's wife. "Behold, David sent messengers to salute our master and he railed on them. But they were good to us. We were not hurt, nor missed we anything so long as we were near them. Now, see what wilt thou do, for evil is set against our master."

As the man spoke to Abigail, her face paled, but she had a just heart and was without fear. She said to the man: "Ye have been well treated by David, son of Jesse, and I shall try to heal this breach and save all from David's men."

She took two hundred loaves and two bottles of wine and five sheep ready dressed, and two measures of parched corn and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs and laid them on asses, and she said to her servants: "Go on before me."

With David were Eliab, Nethaneel and Raddai. David turned to Eliab: "We have lived at peace here in these hills. We have not robbed or harried, and the servants of Nabal have suffered naught. My soul rises against the black ingratitude of this recreant Jew."

"We will wipe him and his people from the earth. He is drunken, he is a tyrant, he loveth no man." Eliab said this.

Nethaneel added: "I would spit in his face a hundred times, I would cut out his heart, cook it and give it to my rams to eat."

Raddai shrugged a shoulder. "Men are as they are and Nabal has never been brought to book. Thousands of others are as bad. Riches pollute, wealth leads into grimy paths. Let Nabal be slain, but in Jehovah's name, save his family and his servants. Why should these poor folk suffer for this man's deeds? Let him go alone to his last resting-place."

David sternly said: "Nabal and his people are our foes, since he denies us bread to eat and wine to drink. He shall not go lonely to his grave. The sacrifice of those we slay will torture him when he enters the land of the hereafter. Death is the least for Nabal!"

Eliab, looking out over the plains, said: "Yonder comes a woman with asses bearing burdens."

David looked down the long hillside. "I know not who she is. Spread here my tent. I will await her coming."

The tent was raised, and at length Abigail got off her ass

and fell before David on her face. "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience. Let not my lord regard this man of Belial—this Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Folly is with him, for I saw the young men whom thou didst send." Abigail's face had anxiety and shame. "I pray thee, forgive the trespass, for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. The souls of thy enemies shall give the Lord God sling as out of the middle of a sling."

David stooped over her. "Dost thou speak only for thyself, or doth thy husband know?"

She stretched her hands and looked into his face. "My husband does not know. I speak only for myself. He lies drunken in his home. I have brought thee loaves and wine and sheep and parched corn and raisins and figs as a gift from Carmel, which my husband owns. I speak only for his people and for myself. I pray thee, have mercy on us all."

Tears were in her eyes, and her lips trembled.

David waved back his people and said to Abigail: "Get thee to thy feet. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee here this day, and blessed be thou which hath kept me from shedding blood. As Jehovah liveth, except thou hadst hasted to me, surely none had been left unto Nabal by the morning. Come into my tent."

He took her hand and they went into the tent and after half an hour he said: "Go up in peace to thine house. See, I have hearkened to thy voice. The God of our fathers be good to thee. Nabal and his people are saved."

Abigail left the tent and went back to Nabal's house, where her lord feasted, and she would tell him naught until the morning light. But when he waked she spoke to him sadly.

"Nabal, thou and all thy people have been saved from death, because I left thee yesterday and went with gifts to one thou hast greatly wronged—to David, son of Jesse. I

pleaded with him and at last he said: 'I forgive thee and thy people and I will not destroy Nabal and all his people!' He has four hundred trained men and they could have utterly made us desolate, and taken all our lives."

Nabal rose up in fury as though he would slay her, and he went for a weapon, but presently his anger vanished. His fury had brought on an inner illness. It had poisoned his blood. His heart died within him and he fell upon his bed ill and could not rise. A dozen times he tried to get to his feet set to slay Abigail, but the spirit behind the Jewish people stayed him. Day by day his sickness grew, and hour by hour he felt his strength lessen, and at last he lifted up his hands and said:

"Why hast thou, Jehovah, taken from me the will to kill and the will to live? I have had riches and plenty. All hereabouts has been mine and now all is naught. I have no strength, I have no motion, my limbs refuse me; my heart is dead within me. My soul awakes at last. God in heaven, I have sinned greatly. . . ." He lay and tossed feebly and darkness came upon his mind. Fury seized him again. "Nay, nay, curses on the world and all therein! Curses on life and time and Israel, and on David, son of Jesse! Curses on all things! Satan is in my soul. I loathe Jehovah, I loathe life—Behold, I die! I curse God—curse God—and die!" With a gasp of rage he gave up the ghost and died.

So ended the life of the drunken Nabal who had shamed the country round. They buried him with the usual lamentations, yet it was hard for those who knew the truth to raise voices in salutation for the dead. Abigail, who had heard his dying curse, did not weep. Her face hardened. Her soul shrank. The air, as was custom, pulsed with wailing, and behind the wailing were the curses which none had heard save Abigail, and that evening they buried Nabal far away from his home, upon a hill.

When David knew that Nabal was dead he said: "Blessed

be the Lord that kept me from evil, for he hath returned Nabal's evil on his own head."

Then he turned to Raddai. "Get thee to Nabal's home and bring Abigail hither. I would marry her."

When Raddai and the servants came to Abigail, Raddai said unto her: "David sent us to take thee to him. He will marry thee."

Her face was startled. She arose, bowed herself to the earth and said: "Let thine handmaid wash the feet of the servants of my lord."

She brought a basin of water and a cloth and would have washed the feet of Raddai.

"Widow of Nabal, I pleaded for thee and all the servants of Nabal before thou camest to my brother. I said that Nabal should go lonely to his grave, but David said: 'They shall all be slain, to be in the presence of Jehovah a menace and a torture to the soul of Nabal.' Thou shalt not wash my feet, nor the feet of any of these servants; but thou wilt come in honour to my brother. While life lasts I will serve thee."

Abigail arose and took five damsels with her and went with Raddai and came at length to David's tent. David held out his arms, but she said: "Embrace me not, my lord, till mourning days be done. Then all I have and all I am are thine."

With bitter sadness David recalled Michal, but he said softly to Abigail: "I will be good to thee."

Her servants went with David's men and pitched Abigail's tent upon a knoll. During the days of mourning David inspected Nabal's estate and counted his sheep and cattle. Here were great riches, and he cared for the woman—she was beautiful and good. He said to Nethaneel: "Nabal, in whose face thou wouldst have spat, is in the dread places. Thy spirit has been saved, as was mine, from one more crime."

"Why dost thou taunt me, David? Am I the scum of thy pot?"

David smiling said: "I taunt myself. How unhappy art thou, Nethaneel! I love thy wife and children; thy daughter Leah has the true spirit of Israel."

Nethaneel shrugged a shoulder. "Thy hates and loves concern me not."

In greatness of heart David stroked the beard of Nethaneel. "Life has not been good to thee. Thou art not good to thyself."

"I am better to myself than is Israel to itself. It gives Saul for our master and he and thou have broken our homes. I have no love for Saul and none for thee. I am a fugitive to save my life."

"Almost thou wouldst curse me, Nethaneel."

"Curses would do thee no harm, David." He waved an angry hand and walked away.

The time came when the days of mourning were over, and with great rejoicing and dancing and singing Abigail was made the wife of David, and better days dawned for him.

CHAPTER XXI

AHINOAM REPROVES SAUL

DAVID'S camp in Engedi grew steadily to a thousand men, and David had three years of life with Abigail. David's mind ever turned to Michal, the daughter of Saul, who had not been sent to him as promised, but always he would obey the voice of the prophet of God.

Every day David's power increased. The records of that power were brought to Saul, and ignoring his pledge, and forgetting that David had saved his life, he once more pursued him. News of this was brought to David, and at last he sorrowfully knew that Saul was gathering a great army which would surround him at Engedi, and break his strength. He wished not to fight his fellow-countrymen, and he sought

Jehovah's will through Abiathar. Jehovah ordered David to go to the city of Gath where Achish, the son of the King, ruled. With all his camp, his brothers and their families and his two wives Abigail and Ahinoam,* whom he had married since, David went to Gath.

Hearing that David had fled to Gath of the Philistines, Saul said to Jonathan: "David has fled to the Philistines. He is a recreant and a coward!"

Jonathan shook his head. "That he has gone to Gath is Jehovah's will. Coward and recreant never!"

Saul's anger was intense. His other sons, Ishui and Melchishua intervened. "All Israel knows the bravery of David," said Ishui.

Melchishua added: "Thou hast never defeated David, and he left Engedi so as not to fight our people. If Jonathan, thy heir, yield unto David, we must abide the judgment of Jehovah."

Jonathan, who had listened sadly, said: "I shall not rule. I have cared only for our people. Where thou goest, my father, I go. Where thou fightest, I fight. Thou hast reigned long and done great deeds. But thou gavest my sister Michal to Phalti, and thou hast not kept thy promise made at Engedi."

Saul's brow darkened. "No, I did not send Michal back. I keep my word when it is right to do so. I am the victorious King of Israel and I fear naught——" Suddenly he broke off, "Yes, yes, I fear the blackness of despair!" At length after inner agitation he drew himself up with assumed courage. "I have defeated all against Israel, and I shall prevail."

At that moment Ahinoam appeared. She was still comely. She was erect, dark-eyed, sober and sorrowful of face, but steady and resolute. She had been Saul's only wife, and he had but the one concubine, Rizpah. The spirit of the doom of Saul and his family had ever been with her, and her own tragedy was settling upon her. She knew that before they

* This, of course, is not Ahinoam, the wife of Saul.

were gone, she herself would go. She had heart-disease, unknown to her family, but she gave no word of it to anyone.

"The fate of our family matters little, the fate of Israel, all. Behind Israel is Jehovah, whose voice we have not heard for many a day. We are exiled from his love——"

Saul laid a hand upon her shoulders. "Thou hast been my loving friend and all thy sons save one are beside thee. Jehovah speaks not to me through his prophets now, yet I have made a nation that shall live." Prodigious vanity spoke here. He swung out his great shoulders and beckoned them to the window.

"See my army under Abner. Victory is on its banners. Near Abner is Doeg. Doeg and his men obey my will. They at least are faithful to me."

Ahinoam, who had listened mournfully, said: "Abner is high, Doeg low. The one is of heaven, the other of hell. In Jehovah's land we shall meet with Abner, but not with Doeg —no! Doeg is the evil spirit of this palace."

Saul turned upon her fiercely. "Doeg brought back Michal to me. He hath done a hundred things none else would do."

"It was evil stealing my daughter from the arms of her husband."

As Ahinoam spoke she trembled and turned pale. Bluish rings gathered round her eyes, and her hand went to her breast. She staggered but Jonathan caught her in his arms.

At that moment Rizpah, the handsome concubine, with her dark eyes, fine figure and splendid face, entered. She relieved Jonathan. Good feeling had ever been between Ahinoam and Rizpah, and she helped Jonathan to carry her to her chamber. Saul, startled, gazed after them sadly.

"All goeth not well," he said.

At last in Ahinoam's chamber, Rizpah leaning over said: "Thou speakest truth to Saul. Greatness is in thee."

Ahinoam was now easier in body. "He has forgotten Jehovah, so he falls."

Jonathan stooped over her. "I stand and fall with him."

Ahinoam looked up tenderly at him. "Kiss me, my beloved son."

CHAPTER XXII

BATHSHEBA AND URIAH

BATHSHEBA'S mother, always ambitious, through her aged brother came to know Uriah, who was rich and reserved in mind and strong and skilful in body. He was a Hittite and there had been a Hittite kingdom, but it had passed. Uriah, whom David had seen in the North of Canaan, became an officer in the Judean army, for the officers of the future king of Israel were chosen independently of nationality. Ittai, who would serve David well, was a Philistine of Gath, and Uriah was a Hittite. Neither was a Jew, but like all great men David chose his weapons as it pleased him, always for the good of his native land.

A man like Uriah fell almost instantly before Bathsheba when he saw her. Bathsheba could not love Uriah, but she saw in him a means of climbing, and ambition was deep in her. Ever since she had heard Hezro chant in the streets of Bethlehem, David had been in her mind. She had seen him when he fought Goliath, and no other man had ever touched her imagination. She would marry Uriah because his riches and his being in David's forces would enable him to rise.

A month after she had met Uriah in her home at Bethlehem—dear to her memory and imagination—this scene occurred:

From her home she could see the field of Boaz, the Mountains of Moab, the plain of Ephriam, and the hills that hid Jerusalem. Her eyes turned ever to the River Jordan to be seen from her home, for in it was the ancient story of Israel. Joshua had crossed it, with his army on dry land,

and Rahab, by shielding spies, had helped Israel to enter the Promised Land. Rahab had been humbly born, but she had risen high and had married a Prince of Judah. Centuries had passed, but thoughts of Rahab were often with her. Somehow Bathsheba's heart grew bigger as she thought that through Uriah she might rise as high as Little Hermon—perhaps as high as Hermon! and she smiled at this thought.

The Holy Land was dear to her—Judah was dearer still. David was born in Judah! So, when Uriah came, reserved as ever and difficult of speech, and yet with manhood and inherent soundness in him, she willed that at last he should say his mind.

It was a beautiful day, and out in the orchard of olive leaves, with the vineyard just beyond and roses and sunflowers blooming and linnets singing, she pretended to demureness and shyness; but behind all was the subtle mind of one who ever knew her way.

From the doorway her mother watched her and she knew that Bathsheba would now act, and she smiled and entered the room and, watchful, sat spinning.

In the orchard Bathsheba shook an olive tree and a few olives fell. Uriah picked them up and handed them to her, and doing so, his fingers touched hers. She looked him shyly in the eyes. Her fingers trembled and he caught her hand in his. He kissed its palm and she did not resist.

In his eyes were depths of feeling, his speech burst out at last: "Bathsheba, I love thee! I love thee!"

She bashfully inclined her head. Then she raised her eyes, slowly to his. He still held the hand he had kissed. With the other she touched his shoulder.

"Hear the birds—Uriah. One bird answereth another. Birds fly towards the sun."

Uriah's heart beat hard. "Is it then to the sun with me?"

She looked into his eyes. "With thee."

In an agony of delight he caught her to his breast and kissed her lips.

Her mother, spinning, saw and was glad. Then there was silence save for the singing of the birds and the chirping of the crickets, and far off the River Jordan flowed and the Mountains of Moab had a golden haze.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CUP OF TREMBLING

DAVID lived in happiness with Abigail and Ahinoam the Jezreelitish woman. Abigail being rich made his path easier with his army and he was ever grateful to her. He married Ahinoam because Abigail did not at first bear him a son—she had two daughters by him. Ahinoam was handsome and young—she gave him his eldest son Amnon, and they both went with him to Ziklag. There Abigail gave birth to Chileab, and David's army rejoiced, for he had now two sons, and his home at Ziklag was large.

David had received word from Jonathan that Saul, denying his word at Engedi, was marshalling a big army against him and his thousand men. Ever prudent and far-seeing David left the hills of Engedi and journeyed with his family and his thousand men into the country of the Philistines.

At Gath he was received with doubtful looks by the Philistines, and his men and family carried themselves with quiet force and dignity through the town. David knew the way to the palace of Achish, the son of the King, and not knowing why he had come the people outside the palace and the attendants made no hostile demonstration. They all rejoiced that the Jewish people were vassals to their king. At the palace David was received with courtesy and he asked to be presented to Achish. Achish was a man of fine feeling and of downright character and bearing. He gladly welcomed David, for he knew him to be a great fighter and that he was pursued by Saul.

In the outer court of the palace he advanced to David with hands outstretched, for he saw in David's eyes great friendliness and appeal. David's natural courtesy overcame all. Achish was about the same age as David and he said: "Why comest thou to the capital of thy people's foes?"

David who wanted safety against Saul whom he wished not to fight, said: "There is no security for me and my small force in Israel, so I came to thee our ancient foe. My men and myself are at thy service, Highness."

So it was that David found grace in the eyes of Achish, and with all his men and his brothers and his family lived in the heart of Gath. There they fared well, for the city was rich, and yet he and his men were not liked by their foes.

One day soon after they came, Achish sent for Jerad. When Jerad entered on him Achish waved a hand of welcome. "Jerad, thou hast long been with the forces of David, son of Jesse; what is thy judgment? Thou hast a keen, observant eye. Give me thy mind."

Jerad bowed low. "I have been with David's forces at Hareth and Engedi and elsewhere. Saul hates him and pursues him. He sent Doeg to steal his daughter from David and has given her elsewhere. He is jealous of David as a fighter. David and his forces will fight his own people."

Achish was of gracious temper. "Good! these people shall stay here. David shall be of my great captains for ever." Then he waved Jerad from his presence.

Time went on. David felt the furtive antipathy of the Philistines, and at last he besought Achish to give him a city where he and his people might live free from constant suspicion.

Achish, ever agreeable and generous, said: "Friend, I will give thee Ziklag. It is in fertile land and it has much water."

David warmly thanked him and left with heart lifted up. After his talk with Achish he said to Nethaneel: "We go to Ziklag. There we shall have safety."

Nethaneel growled. "Thou shalt only have safety when we throw sods on thy tomb!"

From Ziklag David invaded the Geshurites and the Gezrites and the Amalekites, the old foes of the land, and he left neither man nor woman alive. He took the sheep and the cattle and came again to Achish, who, in satirical good humour, said: "Whither have ye made a road today, David?"

"Against the south of Judah, against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites—all my own people once."

Achish believed David, and he said to a general: "He hath made his people Israel utterly abhor him."

For Israel's sake David had deceived—it was the custom of the time, and he played for safety in hard paths and much evil.

One day he sent for Leah. He looked keenly at her. "When didst thou last see Jerad?"

"Yesterday. Through him I learned that a great army is being made by the Philistines against Saul. They have better tools of battle than our people and it will go hard against King Saul."

David's face was quiet and his eyes steady. "Yes, I feared that. Here in Ziklag I move with cautious feet. Though Achish trusts me, one mistake would mean the end of my men and myself, or flight into Israel again, and that I would not have." He came close to her, and gravely he said: "Thou dost love Jerad?"

Leah shook her head. "Far more I love our own people."

David's eyes were dubious. "Leah, wilt thou wed him?"

"I do not know. I see him seldom, but I ever feel him near me." She dropped her head in her hands.

David touched her hands. "Look at me."

She raised her burning eyes. David said: "Thou and I have far to go for Israel's sake. Thou art nearer to me than even my wives, for thou dost understand me."

"Thy wives comfort thee day by day." Passion flared into

Leah's face. "None so lonely in all this land as I. The soul of life is as deep in me as in thee. I long for a home of my own! Dost thou think I should live alone? Dost thou not understand?"

Her eyes were shining. No one in all Israel save a foreigner had touched the chords of her soul. All day, all night the chords softly, distantly, rang.

David was greatly moved. "I understand. Thou shouldst have a home—with Jerad or another? Meanwhile thou maketh my path easier. Thy soul is a fount of blessed water like Jacob's well. I drink from the cup thou dost hold. If ill should come to thee, I should fear my future."

There was wanness in Leah's smile, but great things were behind it. In that barbaric age, when sword and blood were the signs of ruling, pity and love were greater.

"Thou givest me courage to go on." Turning, she left David, who watched her till she entered her father's house nearby, and then he sent for Joab.

"Joab, a great army forms against Saul. I know not what the end will be. I am troubled. I will ask Abiathar to find Jehovah's will!"

Joab, frowning, shook his head, for he liked not this perilous game. Joab had ever felt that this flight to the Philistines was not good. He was a man of downright mind. He had proved himself a splendid captain, and he was loyal to David and his family. But he had a mind with little imagination, and he loathed the Philistines. Yet he had skilfully deceived as David and all his forces had done, for life in a foe's land with its attendant perils appealed to them, and in this city of their foes they had more comfort than they had had in a long time.

Joab said: "I will bring Abiathar, but this is not the way thou wast wont to go. I like it not."

David looked at Joab with eyes that had the light of fate. "'I will believe in the greatness of the Lord in the land of the living. . . . Wait on Jehovah! Courage, and let thy

hand be stronger. Yea, wait on Jehovah!' So I speak to myself, Joab. Get thee gone for Abiathar," and Joab, bewildered by David, passed from the room.

Left alone, David leaned his head in his hand, striving to see his way. He would await the command of God.

Abiathar came, and Joab left him alone with David. Abiathar sought to find Jehovah's will but failed. At last the answer came: "He shall go with Achish."

David's face clouded. "I foresee not the end."

"Thou shouldst not see beyond Jehovah's will. Draw closer to God and all will yet be well."

So the time came when, outside their own country, the Philistines gathered at Aphek, and David and his forces came in the rearward with Achish. Then the great men of the Philistines said in anger: "What do these Hebrews here?"

Achish instantly protested. "Is not this David son-in-law of Saul the King of Israel, who is David's foe? He fights the father of his wife. He hath been with me many days, and I find no fault with him."

They replied fiercely: "Make this fellow return. Let him not go with us. Is not this the warrior of whom they sang, 'Saul slew his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?'"

At last Achish called David. "Surely, thou hast been upright. I have not found evil in thee. Yet they favour thee not, wherefore return in peace."

Now David understood Jehovah's command. He would escape fighting with Saul and would return to Ziklag.

David spoke sagely. "What hast thou found in thy servant that I may not fight against thy foes?"

"Thou art good in my sight as an angel of God, but the lords of the Philistines say 'He shall not go.' Wherefore, depart in peace."

With joy David said to Joab and Abiathar: "Now I understand Jehovah's will. See, the Philistines march and we remain. We will return to Ziklag."

David and his army watched the Philistines move on towards Jezreel, where the Israelites were camped by a fountain.

Returning David had anxiety, he knew not why. Jerad had not gone with the Philistines, but remained with his own men. For two days they travelled and at last came in sight of Ziklag. They all were astounded at the ruins of the place; it had been burnt with fire. In fear they hastened on. The Amalekites had smitten Ziklag and had carried all the women captive. David's two wives, Abigail and Ahinoam, and Leah were captive also, and David's men loudly wept.

David called for Abiathar. "I pray thee, bring the ephod and I myself will seek Jehovah's will." David prayed. "Oh merciful God, my soul is troubled and bowed down. Wilt Thou listen to Thy servant? Shall I overtake these foes and destroy them?"

And the Voice came from the void: "Thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all."

David turned to his grieving army and gave them the Lord's command. They ceased weeping and hastened till they came to the brook Besor. David left here two hundred men behind who were so faint they could not cross Besor. Then they found a man in a field and gave him bread and water, for he was starving, and David said to him: "To whom belongest thou? Whence art thou?"

"I am of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me because three days ago I fell ill. I saw them burn Ziklag with fire."

David eagerly asked him: "Canst thou bring me to the Amalekites?" The man shuddered. "Swear unto me that thou wilt neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down."

David gave his word and they marched on. The Egyptian brought them to the Amalekite army under a hill, and the troops were spread upon the earth, eating and drinking and dancing, because of the great spoil they had taken.

Coming down the hill, David's men fell upon them and

smote them sorely, and he recovered all the Amalekites had carried away, and all the women and children.

David found his two wives Abigail and Ahinoam, and Leah, whom the Amalekites had not treated ill.

Abigail with joy in her face spoke to him gladly after he had embraced her: "Oh lord and master, thou hast smitten these robbers and we are once more in thy dear hands."

"We have been saved to serve thee in the great days to come." Ahinoam added this.

Leah did not speak, but stood silent, looking at David, with her mother and Miriam her sister. Her mother said: "Thou hast been our salvation, David."

David smiled at her: "This day has been a victory for Judah. Jehovah hath saved me from smiting Saul and the Israelites. Come back to Ziklag; there we shall dwell in peace."

They took all the flocks and the herds of the Amalekites. "This is our David's spoil," Eliab said.

Nethaneel, whose heart was thankful that his wife and daughters had been saved from evil, said: "Out of the pit comes the peradventure."

Shammah retorted. "The peradventure is thy family there."

Then Raddai. "He knows not what he says. His mind is peradventure."

Nethaneel shrugged a shoulder. "Peradventure is luck in not fighting our own people! Yet I like it not!"

"We have good food and good homes in this city of our foes, but, like Nethaneel, I like it not," said Eliab.

"I like it well," said Ozem, "for David planned it and we prosper under him."

The two hundred left behind at the brook of Besor came to salute David, and some said: "Because they went not with us, we will give them naught of the spoil."

But David shook his head and raised his spear of authority:

"As his part is that goeth down to the battle so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike."

The statute he made became an ordinance for ever in Israel. He divided the spoil among his men. There was peace once again in Ziklag, and they builded it up, cleansing it from the fire.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PASSING OF SAUL

THE hosts of the Philistines assembled at Shunem and Saul's army gathered at Gilboa. Looking over the vast army of the Philistines, Saul feared it. In his despair he sought the Lord through a priest, but Jehovah answered him not. Again and again he appealed and there was no response. He looked around him. Ahinoam, his wife, was ill. His sons were busy under Abner. He said to Doeg: "A woman with a familiar spirit—is there one—that I may inquire of her?"

"Yes, at Endor. If thou wilt disguise thyself I will go with thee."

Saul touched Doeg's shaggy beard. "Thou hast been a faithful friend and servant. To Endor let us go."

Saul disguised himself. They travelled in constant danger on the border of the Philistine army. Twice they were challenged and choked their challengers to death, and came at last to the witch of Endor.

Her cave was hung about with symbols of her ugly trade and a mist as from a huge kettle filled the place. It had not an air of this world. She was thin and fiery-eyed and gaunt. Saul shrank from her for her look was that of Hades.

"Summon one whom I shall name to thee," said the gloomy Saul.

The woman, who knew him despite his disguise, answered

cunningly: "Thou layest a snare for my life. Thou knowest the King hath cut off those who have familiar spirits."

"As the Lord liveth, no punishment shall come to thee."

The aged crone shook her evil head. "Whom shall I call unto thee?"

"Bring up the prophet Samuel."

At this request, the witch, coming close to him, cried with a loud voice: "Thou hast deceived me, thou art Saul the King!"

Saul drew himself up: "I am the King. No harm shall come to thee."

Then the hag raised a scrawny arm and in a shrill voice bade Samuel rise. After a moment a dim figure appeared with a long cloak. When she saw it she gave a low moan.

"What seest thou?" asked Saul.

"An old man cometh up, he is covered with a mantle."

Saul stooped to the ground and the witch covered her face. Doeg fell flat. A voice said sternly: "Why dost thou bring me up? Speak!"

Saul trembled. "I am sore troubled. The Philistines make war and Jehovah answereth me no more. I have called thee to tell me what to do."

Grim and ghostly, the mystic figure said: "Thou didst not obey. The Lord hath given thy kingdom unto David. Tomorrow He will deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines."

Doeg raised his vicious face from the ground in woe. Saul fell upon the earth and was sore afraid. There was no strength in him.

Then the mystic figure vanished and all the night grew black.

The witch came trembling and stood over the shaken Saul as he lay upon the earth. "Let me give thee food that thou mayest have strength for thy travel."

Saul shook his head in gloom. Tragedy was in his face. Doeg sat moving his head in stark despair. He knew the end

of Saul was near. Yet he was hungered and would eat. He importuned, but Saul answered: "I will not eat."

Doeg pleaded and the witch also. At last Saul hearkened and rose heavily from the earth. The woman brought bread and dates and beans and peas and grapes before Saul and Doeg, and they did eat. Doek ate ravenously, for danger and emotion exhaust the body. Though without fear of death he had no wish to die.

At last he came heavily to Saul: "O King, live for ever. May the seed of thy body be as flowering trees for Israel. Thou hast builded her up. All shall be well with thee."

"No, I shall not live for ever. My day is come. Hath not the prophet spoken?"

Doeg said with great cunning: "There are good and evil spirits. This was not the prophet Samuel, but one that made pretence. Thou hast thy foes in the after-world as here. Fear not. All shall be well."

Saul almost eagerly stood up. "By my father's ashes, thou givest me better spirit. The face seemed that of Samuel—Yet, I came in disguise here and one might falsely come as a prophet. Even so as thou sayest, Doeg." He laughed, but it was an ugly laugh, it had no humour.

"Thou shalt live on! None can defeat thee. Thou hast thy son Jonathan and thy other sons, and thou hast Abner, thy great sarsaba. Return with resolution. Thou hast lifted up our land and tomorrow thou shalt cease to be vassal of the Philistines. Thou shalt destroy them. Thou shalt take their cities and make them thy servants and slaves."

Saul's face lighted. "Thou seest far, Edomite. Aye, but I do love thee, man. Come—come with me back to camp."

With sturdy spirit they left the cave of the witch and, skirting the Philistine lines in safety, returned to Gilboa.

When they reached the mountain Saul, fatigued, lay down and slept in peace until dawn. Then he waked and summoned Abner. "This day shall the Philistines be broken as

this bread crumbles in my hand." In his huge hand he crumbled bread and cast it on the ground.

Abner looked over the host of the Philistines and shook his head: "When my king speaketh all the world must hear. But they are more than we and better armed, as they have been always. I am thy sarsaba and thou the king, and the fate of Israel and thy fate is mine. I am glad thou facest this battle with a great heart."

"Within an hour we attack, Abner."

Saul sent for Jonathan and Ishui and Melchishua, but not for Ishbosheth. He was at Gibeah in the palace and could not fight, for he was ill.

Saul waved Jonathan apart. He pointed towards the Philistine camp. "Today is Israel's day. I will bring these Philistines to the dust. Israel shall be free and I no longer vassal."

Jonathan shook his head. "May thy prophecy be true! Thou hast many foes in Israel. This day brings thy fate and mine. Have I not shown I can fight for thee?"

"Thou hast saved our people as when thou didst eat honey against my law and broke the Philistines. Eat what honey thou wilt, and today Israel shall know that Saul is his people's salvation."

A curious, sad, almost impatient look came into Jonathan's face. He loved life, but he loved the people more. "As I have always fought so shall I fight this day. Behind the sword is my love for Israel greater than all else in the world."

"Greater than for the rebel David?"

"I love Israel, and next to Israel, David—no rebel, but my brother in blood."

"Thou lovest where I hate. I am Saul, the King. I shall not die. I shall live on. This battle of Gilboa shall be the new ten commandments of stone, and I will have it so!"

Jonathan and Ishui and Melchishua entered the battle, strong and brave but depressed, for they had omen of the end of all.

Saul returned to his tent, and there upon her bed was Ahinoam, his wife, straight and still. He stooped and touched her. She was dead. She had died alone. With a groan of agony he drew a cloth over her face and went out, closing the curtain of the tent behind him. This death of Ahinoam before his great battle shook him greatly. He drew close the curtain so that none should enter, and that the death of the King's wife should not trouble the spirits of his army.

With stern look he placed himself at the head of his troops, and with singing and music they marched hard towards the Philistines.

At last, in the bright sun, the troops closed, and Saul saw soon the battle going sore against him. As the fight grew fiercer, he saw Ishui and Melchishua fall in the midst of the Philistines, but he saw Jonathan fighting on. Then he lost sight of him.

In vain Abner, at the head of the second division, sought to retrieve the losing fight. He was struggling hopelessly, for the Philistines were well led. They had better weapons of war, though on the heights of Gilboa their chariots were handicapped. Saul, with skill, had selected Gilboa as the scene of the great struggle which was yet to end fatally for his army and himself and his house.

Jonathan was in control of a division and he handled it with skill. But the approaching tragedy was in his mind, and even Saul, so dominant and defiant before the fight, steadily lost heart.

Against Jonathan's division was a large number of Philistines. They fought with fury, for they recalled how at Michmash Jonathan and another had brought confusion in their ranks and before Saul and his men they had fled in dismay and disaster. They were now set to destroy Jonathan.

Jonathan was at last surrounded. His men fell back under great pressure. Five attacked him and he fought them all, but he was doomed. In vain he cried: "Jehovah, help me

smite these pagan devils!" But Jehovah did not give the needful help.

Desperately fighting against the five well-armed Philistines, he fell. In vain he tried to rise against the spears. They pierced him again and again. At last, in the light of the setting sun, in a sky that was sweet with colour, with a heart that must presently be still forever, Jonathan sank to the ground, under the cloud of spears. He raised a hand as though to wave them off, and said: "Have done. Let me see the sky." They drew back before the dying man. He half raised himself, and with shining, yet fading eyes, he murmured: "David—O David!" and his eyes closed for ever.

So passed from cark and care a great and noble soul. With the fall of Jonathan and his brothers, even Saul and Abner could not retrieve the day. The battle raged fiercely against Israel.

At last the Jewish forces began to flee, and in the thick of the fray the archers hit Saul, and he was sorely wounded. Saul looked for Doeg, but did not find him, and he said to his armour-bearer: "Draw thy sword and thrust me through," but his armour-bearer would not. He feared to slay the Lord's anointed.

In black despair and with a loud cry to Jehovah, Saul fell upon his own sword and his great body lay throbbing, and he died without a word. His armour-bearer, seeing Saul dead, also fell upon his sword and lay beside him.

The brave Gibborim, seeing Saul and his dead sons, fled at last and night fell upon a darkened and conquered land. The stars came out, the moon shone and the bodies of the slain lay unburied.

In the morning the Philistines came to strip the slain. They found Saul and his sons dead, Jonathan with a smile on his face. They cut off Saul's head and stripped away his armour. With great rejoicing they put Saul's armour in the temple of Ashtaroth at Bethshan, and they fastened his body and those of his sons to the wall of Bethshan.

The people of Jabesh-Gilead, the Gibeonites, learning of the death of Saul and Jonathan and his other sons, travelled all night to Bethshan where the bodies had been nailed to the wall, and they wept when they saw them. The anointed King and his sons were hanging there; all life fled for ever from them. With sorrowful hearts they took the bodies down and carried them secretly away, and half way to Jabesh-Gilead they burned the bodies on a great fire, chanting the psalm of death. They gathered up the bones, and hastened with them to their city and buried them under a carob tree, and they fasted and mourned seven days. Out of the goodness of their hearts they had placed themselves in great danger going to Bethshan, where the Philistines had rule, and they had done it for love of Israel. Now David would be king of all the land, and of that they were glad, but they mourned for the dead, and Saul had died ignobly on his own sword. Every day they sang:

"Oh, how hath God smitten Israel! How hath the sky darkened and the Jordan run dry! Is not the hand of Jehovah just? Will he make bright the sky once more? Hear us, hear us, oh Jehovah!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE CROWNING OF DAVID

WITH Joab and his brothers, David overwhelmingly defeated the Amalekites, rescued his wives Abigail and Ahinoam, and lived in the restored city of Ziklag. In Ziklag the Jews prospered, and though there was still danger because of the antipathy of the Philistines, the punishment of the Amalekites was approved by them.

One day as David left his home to superintend work in Ziklag he met Leah, and he welcomed the meeting. "We

are restoring the city fast. Our men work hard. Child of Israel, God was with us when ye all were in great danger."

"When Ziklag was put to fire and sword, I recalled that always the skies opened and Jehovah's hand reached down. It has ever saved us. We were at the mercy of the Amalekites, but they did no evil save in the slaying of our men. Thy wives and I and all our women were safe. When thou dost fight the Amalekites again, I pray thee, remember that."

David's face lighted. "When I fight them again I shall recall thy words."

David's house stood high, and at that moment he saw someone with torn clothes and dishevelled head entering the town. He pointed and his eyes gloomed. "One comes who brings dark news."

"He is an Amalekite—I know the dress. He comes from Gilboa." Leah said this.

At last the man neared his home and David sent an orderly to bring him. The panting soldier stood before David.

"Who art thou? Whence comest thou?"

"Highness, I am from the battle of Gilboa. King Saul, standing wounded upon the hill, said to me 'Who art thou?' and I said 'I am an Amalekite.' 'Then hold thy spear and let me fall upon it. Thou art my foe and I am sorely wounded,' and so I did. I have brought with me the crown from his head and the bracelet from his arm. I give them unto thee. Saul and Jonathan and his two other sons are slain. Behold!"

As the man spoke, David's face took on a look of agony. He rent his clothes and wept. "Thou base man, didst thou not fear to kill the Lord's anointed?" He beckoned to his young men. "Fall upon him and destroy him."

The Amalekite, shuddering, knelt and pleaded. "Thou art now ruler in Judah—I have brought thee the crown and bracelet of Saul. Oh, let me live—oh, spare my life!"

David looked sorrowfully at the crown and bracelet, and

he shook his head. "Thou darest to slay what God hath blessed! Thou shalt die, blasphemer!"

The young men dragged the man away—a liar and a rogue—and slew him, and David said: "Thy blood upon thy head, for thy mouth hath testified against thee!"

David's eyes were wet, and his wives Abigail and Ahinoam, who had entered, and Leah also rent their clothes and wept. His body trembled with emotion. As the Amalekite was carried away, he leaned against the wall and watched. His voice broke forth huskily again. "Oh, thou evil one! To slay the King of Israel! Well is it thou wert not an Israelite —that shame we are saved! Here in the Philistine city I mourn for those I loved. My hand was never raised against Saul. I thank Jehovah I was not in Israel when they died!"

His wives dared not speak to him now. What could they say? But in the streets and in the houses the voices of the men and their families wailed for the death of Saul—in this Philistine city!

David now called Joab and gave orders for all to make ready to go. In three hours they were outside Ziklag and on their way to Hebron, marching and wailing for the dead King of Israel. At last as the sun was descending, David called a halt. A tender mist was rising over the vast tumbled country. The way to Hebron was full of dry water-courses, and there were many trees. Here and there vineyards dotted the hillsides. Sheep and goats were many and shepherds played upon their lutes. As David heard these shepherds play and saw the soft lights of Heaven above him, his grief again became intense. He gathered his wives and brothers and family round him and ordered Joab to assemble the army, then, taking his harp, in the growing dusk he chanted:

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; how are the mighty fallen!

"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,

lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

"Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil!

"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

"Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

As far as eye could see was the fertile country that circled Hebron, one of the most sacred spots in the Holy Land. Abraham and Jacob had made it memorable. High hills were around it, and the land was green. People were still gathering from all Judah and from the Israelite districts. Over the hills and through the valleys they came, and a vast excited crowd faced David when he stepped forth from his tent with his wives, his brothers and their families.

At David's appearance the vast crowds cheered greatly. David bowed gravely to the shouting. His manner and his body were quiet and firm, and though not tall he seemed tall; so does spiritual faith enlarge the physical stature. In his eyes was the light which would be for all time the pride and

glory of his people. His lips smiled, for this day was the great day of his life. At last he would stand as the leader of the people of Judah. Though many were taller and more ponderous, yet among them all none had his good resilience of body, his subtle and noble vigour of mind. At his side slightly behind were his brothers and their families, and on the other side were his wives and his great captains, Joab and Abishai and Asahel and Amasa, all with pride in their faces, for at last David would be the accepted of the people. Their men stood behind, excitement in their faces and in their bearings, and with a rigid discipline got by much training. Yet the rigidity throbbed with emotion. It was like a storm while still the sun is shining.

The prophet Abiathar, who had awaited David's coming, dressed in the robes of a high priest which he had brought from Nob, stepped forward and bowed. Then he took David's hand and turned with him towards the people.

"Will ye make David, son of Jesse, King of Judah?"

Every weapon of David's army was raised and every tool of war in the hands of the people, and with resonant voice they shouted: "Ay, David, King of Judah! May he live a thousand years!"

Abiathar let go David's hand. "David, thou art King of Judah, and may Jehovah be ever with thee."

Then Abiathar took from the hands of Joab the crown of Saul and his bracelet, and the crown was put on David's head and the bracelet on his arm.

Doeg, who had fled from Ishbosheth, for Abner would not have him, had come to Hebron. In anger he came to David's coronation. At the crowning he gnashed his teeth. "Saul was my master and my king. I should have killed thee, David, and he should not have died, but I will slay thee yet, thou dog of Judah!"

David now spoke: "The honour ye give me is dear to my soul. Behold, my feet have now been set in a large room. I have been an exile in the hills, I have wandered far and

fought much, but never against mine own people. I have fought our foes. The Lord hath been a lantern to my feet and a light unto my path. In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel! In Salem also is His tabernacle and His dwelling-place in Zion. Saul builded up Israel and did well for her. Yonder sun shines on those who live and those who die. It shines on Saul the anointed of God. I married his daughter Michal. She shall return to me."

His wives looked at each other in amazement, and Abigail's eyes dropped. Michal had been his first wife, and David's heart was still with her. There was great cheering here, and David's gesture stayed it. "I can never pay the debt I owe ye all, yet I shall strive. I was a shepherd boy on the hills of Bethlehem, I am of Judah. My life has been in perils oft, but Jehovah has saved me until now. By God's help I will break the Philistines. I shall cease to be a vassal of those who slew Saul at Gilboa. In your hills I learned to worship God, in their loneliness I heard His voice and may I hear it still! I led my sheep in the wilderness with my rod and staff, and with a rod and staff I shall lead Jehovah's children now." He raised his eyes to the sky and his lips trembled—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

The shouting and applause of the people echoed through the hills and David turned to his wives.

Near to David were Leah and Jerad. To them both this day was printed red in the story of their lives. Though they stood apart yet they looked into each other's eyes.

At some distance from Jerad and Leah stood Doeg. Here he was at the crowning of David, whose wife he had stolen by Saul's command. Dark looks were turned on him and one huge Jew confronted him. "What dost thou here, thou plague of Saul?"

In his eyes was murder and his fingers felt for his knife, as did the hands of others. Doeg said calmly: "Saul my King is dead. I came to offer my sword to David. I have

the gift of the sword as all men in Judah know. If I meant not well, should I be here?"

His reasoning influenced his stern critic. "I will await what the King shall do." He let go his knife and turned away, and the others, frowning, did the same.

Sherah and his daughter Ruth, who had listened to his talk with the Jews, were greatly moved by the crowning. Doeg now hastily left the grounds with his women. He had no wish to be brought to David.

Far away from David stood Bathsheba. She listened with delight to the shouting of the people. Beauty she had and charm—all felt it. In her the action of presence, which all people possess who have moved the world, was dominant. Even in this vast crowd many looked at her as though they had been called. Her mother had been an able woman and had now gone to her long home.

Bathsheba had seen David often, and in his presence something ever stirred in her pulses more than ever throbbed her veins with any other man. She had married Uriah the Hittite and her will had been to make him one of David's great captains. Ambition was the great motive of her life. She had faith in David's star ever since as a child of three she had heard Hezro sing at Bethlehem. The words he sang had ever been with her and she heard them now. Other women loved finery and handsome clothes, and though Uriah was liberal in these things she looked upon them only as means towards an end. She liked them too, but her spirit was above them. They were the details of her career; decorations only added to the glory of the scene. Her whole being had been thrilled by the crowning. "David, oh David, King of Judah! Live a thousand years—David, David!"

Thus she spoke in her heart; her eyes were dim and the people were like a dream to her. She was abstracted from the scene. She had far vision, and with David as King her horizon widened. She felt great things before her now, but what they were she did not guess. Yet she felt that this day was

more than David's crowning. Somehow it was her crowning too.

Benaiah, son of Jehoida of the tribe of Levi, was wealthy, and he also was present at the coronation. He was a great fighter, and no man in Israel was like him in the straightness of his life. He was tall and handsome, and, like David, had killed lions and bears. His pulses beat faster at the cheering in which he joined. One man near him did not cheer, but he gently smiled. It was Lokman the Ethiop slave. Lokman, seeing the faithful look in Benaiah's eye, came and said: "I was with Saul, and I would serve David. Wilt thou bring me to him, master Benaiah?"

Benaiah shook his head. "I am but King David's humble captain. I have no power with him. This has been the greatest day Judah ever knew."

Lokman shrugged a shoulder in doubt.

"What is thy name," Benaiah asked.

"I was an Ethiop slave. Lokman is my name."

"Thou shalt meet King David through his brother Eliab."

"I pray thee, take me to Eliab, the eldest brother of the eldest man in all the world."

In doubt Eliab looked at Lokman, who had been one of Saul's household, and he had often seen him. "What canst thou do, Lokman?"

"I have an unruly tongue. I am a rebel."

Eliab laughed. "As a rebel I will bring thee to the King of Judah." The red-headed Eliab took Lokman to David, smiling sourly as they went.

David said to Eliab: "What can he do?"

"He can rebel against Judah, David."

"Thou hast seen rebellion and hast been a rebel with me. Thou knowest well the rebel thought, Eliab. What canst thou do, Lokman?"

"Life is a jest, O King—I would be thy jester!"

David liked the man. The boldness of his reply pleased him. He liked a mind out of the usual moulds. "Life is no

jest, Lokman, but thou shalt be my jester," and he touched him with his spear.

The days at Engedi and in the hills of Judah were so near that every man felt the hand of God had been with them. In the bright sun on the green plateau they held their heads high and they danced and sang.

While David moved among the people, greeting them, messengers came from Jabesh-Gilead. These Gibeonites sought his presence and Joab brought them to him. All the people ceased their dancing and drew near before these sorrowful men, and watched them gravely.

They spoke to David: "O King, live for ever! Our people have taken the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Bethshan and burnt them and their bones are buried under a tree in Jabesh, and behold we fasted and mourned seven days."

These men had been those who sought Saul's help against the King of the Ammonites, and Saul had saved them. They had been ever grateful, and David recalled it now. In deep emotion he said:

"Blessed are ye that have shown such kindness unto Saul and his sons, and have buried them. Therefore, may your hands be strengthened. While Israel endures ye shall be honoured." He embraced their leader and waved his hand to the rest.

The men of David came round the Gibeonites and they feasted them greatly. At last the sun sank brilliantly down, and the fires of the camp were lighted.

David left the people and went to his palace with all his court. Dismissing his family and the others he bowed his head and brooded. After a time the cheering of the people roused him, and he stood up with revived spirit. Now he stretched a hand towards the sky.

"Jehovah, my soul shall be true to Thee. In time of drought, in time of flood, when the sun shines on the Jordan

and on Hebron, or when the sky is dark and the land is drear —may my soul yield good for Thy people Israel!"

The college at Ramah, with the houses at Naioth where the teachers and prophets lived, had ever been faithful to David. He had stayed at Ramah with Samuel for many days, and there had chanted and had captured them all. Gad the seer was now head of the great school. When news came that Saul and all his sons save Ishbosheth were dead Ramah went frenzied with joy. From Naioth the students marched through Bethlehem, shouting: "King Saul is dead, long live King David! He is of us, he shall ever be with us! Hear now, Bethlehem, we chant the blessing of Jehovah upon David, King of Judah!"

There was no home in Bethlehem where a light did not burn, nor one where people did not chant praise of David. In every town and village between Bethlehem and Hebron, at Etam and Tekoah and all other places they sang the praises of David, and people gathered and marched singing with them. At last they neared Hebron, and the Judeans came from their houses and saluted them gladly. They were led by Gad and the students of Ramah, and in an imposing procession they neared the palace of David, and all the lights in the town were burning. The high hills glowed under the stars and the crescent moon, and the vast group moved down the hills with voices like the murmur of soft-flowing waters. Followed by the people of Hebron they came to David's palace, and the soldiers led by Joab hastily assembled and made a vast semicircle round them.

Joab was about to enter the palace, but David came out and gladly welcomed them. His heart was full.

Then, while their voices rang out again in the famous chant "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be raised up ye everlasting doors," David embraced Gad and brought him into the palace, and the people cared for the men of Ramah.

CHAPTER XXVI

"UNCLEAN!—UNCLEAN!"

TIME passed on. Twice David had seen a beautiful girl not far from his palace. She was tall, with dark brown hair, dreamy eyes and pale face. She had long eyelashes, exquisite hands and a carriage like that of a gazelle. David did not know she was the daughter of Doeg, who had come to live at Hebron. He was in David's capital, and had been at his coronation.

They lived in a small house in a quiet way, but there was food in plenty, and Ruth had rings, necklaces and anklets, though for these she cared but little, yet her aunt Sherah, who had fine simplicity and resolution, made her wear them. Ruth had firm character, yet in her eyes was a glint of tragedy. It was never absent, and what was in her heart she did not know. She was not of this world in a true sense, she was of a world not belonging to any of the tribes of Canaan or the Amalekites, the Moabites and the rest, but one from the south, from the Negeb, from the land of Edom, a wilderness of caves and dark places.

David had been struck by her rare personality. Before the battle of Gilboa, which ended the dynasty of Saul, he had seen her going to market with her rings, necklaces and anklets. He was a soldier and a king, but he was also a poet and a dreamer, and the remembrance of her lissomness and grace followed him. With the love of God in his heart, he would always fight his human frailty and he would conquer in the end, but his struggle would be great.

After the battle of Gilboa he saw her walking in Hebron from a well with a jar of water on her head. She had seen him often, and the memory of him haunted her. She tried in vain to put him from her mind, and when coming from the well she saw him, she flushed softly from chin to hair.

He was riding with three of his brothers and men of his

bodyguard under Benaiah. They all watched him closely, for what he did, as King, had consequence. His eyes and hers met; he smiled and hers drooped. She moved on gently towards her home. David waved his brothers and the Gibborim back and followed her. He rode to her on his white mule.

"What is thy name?" he asked, smiling.

She turned and looked at him. "Ruth" was her reply, and the long lashes of her shining eyes touched her cheek.

"It is a good name. I am descended from a Ruth. My name is David."

She smiled now. "Thou art King of Judah. I saw thee crowned—I and my father!"

"Art thou a Judean?" She shook her head in negation.

"A Moabite?"

"No, I am not a Moabite."

"Art thou a Canaanite?" Again negation.

David laughed, his eyes shone and his voice was full of melody like his harp. "I will not ask thy father's name. It matters not. Thou art thyself, and thou art of my people."

He raised a hand in greeting. "The God of our fathers be with thee!" He turned away but looked back at her. "We shall meet again," he said.

She watched him go, and tides of feeling almost smothered her. She shook her head. "Thou hast called me friend, King David, but thou canst be no friend to me when the truth is known."

Her face suffused. She walked slowly homewards and at the door she met her father.

He saw her look. "What hast thou seen?"

"Whom thou didst try to kill, whose wife thou didst steal—David, King of Judah."

Anger swept his face. "I will kill him yet."

"Nay, thou wilt never kill thy king."

"My king died at Gilboa, and were it not for thee, would

that I had died with him! He made Israel great. But the prophets were against him!"

She passed within the home, sadly shaking her head, and she kissed Sherah with dim eyes.

Doeg looked after her, his hands clenching in anger. Then his face cleared and he said to himself: "Blessed art thou among women, O my daughter—greater than thou is not in all Israel." A smile came to his swarthy face.

The face of Ruth followed David, and he joined his brothers and his Gibborim again. They forbore to question him, but went with him to his palace.

Eliab said sneeringly to Nethaneel: "The girl is beautiful, and he has an eye for beauty."

Nethaneel replied: "He has an evil eye and a golden tongue. He wins all the way. He was a shepherd boy—he is King of Judah, and, by the ashes of Moses, he will be King of Israel."

Raddai, ever well-balanced and naturally just, shook his head: "We have more than we ever had at Bethlehem. Let us be content."

David did not hear this. He was intent on his own thoughts and none rode beside him. At his palace steps he dismounted, smiled at his brothers and entered.

Time went on. One day in her home Ruth was putting out a candle with her fingers, and her fingers felt no heat. She looked at them; it seemed so strange. That very day David sent for her. He did not yet know who she was, though his brothers and Joab and Benaiah knew, and did not tell him. He only knew where she lived.

When David sent his brothers, Eliab and Ozem, for her, her aunt said: "He is King of Judah. Go."

So she was brought to David's palace by Eliab and Ozem, and at the outer door they left her, smiling strangely at each other. Two saw her coming—Ahinoam and Abigail, and bitterness was in their hearts. Here was one younger than they who might lessen them in the affections of the King.

As Ruth entered the outer court Abigail gazed fixedly at her. Something in Ruth's dejected look struck at her heart. She led her into the inner chamber where was Ahinoam.

By David's orders Abiathar had prepared a peace offering of a goat in the inner chamber, where an altar had been built and it had become a tabernacle for David and his court. The goat had been killed and all had been done in order of the ritual. Abigail and Ahinoam had been in attendance with the household. The sacrifice over, Abiathar the high priest had departed, and David also.

Suddenly Abigail whispered to Ahinoam and passed her hand swiftly through the fire of the sacrifice, and Ahinoam did the same, and they looked at Ruth. Ruth, who had not seen them whisper, remembering the candle, moved her hands slowly through the flame and felt nothing. She stood in terror looking at her fingers. Startled, Abigail and Ahinoam whispered again together. Abigail saw triumph in Ahinoam's eyes.

"*She is a leper!* as far from David as the sun is from the earth," said Abigail.

Ahinoam flushed and was agitated. "See her in her woe—the leper! So far God is on our side!"

A direful sight—a girl of nineteen, beautiful and good, stricken by that disease which separates the victim for ever from all people. The curtain of tragedy had fallen, and the world was now a cauldron of black evils.

So had the bright day turned for Ruth. So had the mists upon the hills of Judah become the former and the latter rains, when all the sky is black with clouds and thunder and lightning. For her the thunder and the lightning and the rain would never cease while life lasted. It would be a perpetual shame. With the heart and character to make a loving wife, she was now cut off for ever, abhorred of all, abominable to herself. No joys of married life, no home, no children—nothing but continual doom! Her look was that

of some lost soul strayed from the Gehenna that all would shun.

Something touched the heart of Abigail and Ahinoam, and they moved forward friendly towards her, though they dared not touch her.

At that moment David entered, but Abigail swiftly rushed forward with upraised hands: "Back, back, O King!"

David stood amazed. "Wherefore dost thou command?"

"To save thy life! *She is a leper!*"

Ruth sank slowly to the ground, her head bowed forward, her hands between her knees.

David was horror-stricken. "What proof?"

Abigail replied: "Her hand passed through the fire of sacrifice slowly and felt naught."

Looking at the stricken form of Ruth there swept a shadow over him which he would recall until the pendulum of his clock of time had stopped. Now she had passed from him for ever. His world grew dark. He longed to touch this tragic figure, but he dared not. She was a leper!

After a moment of tragic woe he said: "Get thee for ever to the distant hills. Get thee gone!"

He stood still in sorrow, and Abigail said: "She is the daughter of Doeg the Edomite."

Startled, David's hands opened and shut in anguish. "The daughter of my foe, who sought my life and stole Michal from me!" He stood shaken to the soul, then said quietly. "Thy King commands thee, go!"

Ruth rose slowly to her feet. With a face as of one sculptured in the limestone of her hills and eyes that saw life's coming terror, she went slowly into the streets. As she passed people who would have spoken to her, she cried: "Unclean—unclean!" and, frightened, they fell back. Passing out of the city by the gate of Zion, she met her father, Doeg.

"Unclean—unclean!" she said. He stood still, terror in his face.

"The King has driven me to the hills. I shall never return. I am a leper!"

Not even Doeg's granite soul could face this tragedy without shrinking. It was as though a hundred spears had torn all his limbs. His black past suddenly swam before him. He had done evil things—murder and theft and pillage had been his daily food, and now she that he loved more than all on earth was for ever barred from him. In agony he stretched his arms to her but she cried again: "Unclean—unclean! Touch me not!"

With smothering bitterness he turned from her. He looked on the hills to which she would go, towards the caves in which she would hide, getting her food as she might, living like the panther and the lizard and the weasel, at home only with the creatures of the field and the hillside! The world grew dark.

His great head moving from side to side, and the will to murder in him, Doeg moved swiftly towards the palace. At the door they tried to stop him, but he drove them off and hurried to find David. He passed the place of sacrifice. He saw the faces of David's saddened wives and he rushed on to find his victim.

In the next chamber he found the King. In his face was anguish, and in his eyes misery for the girl's fate. He stood up and looked calmly at the furious Doeg.

"On thee, Doeg, thou viper, has come the curse of God. Thy only child is a leper. Thou wouldst have killed me, thou didst steal my wife Michal, and now the God of Abraham has smitten thee."

He spoke with fearless power; he did not flinch from the upraised knife. Suddenly Doeg felt the dominating courage of the man. He hesitated, cowered, and presently the weapon fell from his hands. Something had struck deeper than his will to kill. In David's face was anguish, and this was the man he had wronged! This prince would have taken his one

ewe lamb and made for it a fold, and now it was all done for ever. He brokenly said:

"I came to kill thee, but thou hast slain me. I leave thee, an outcast like my child. Why did I not die with Saul, my master, and his sons?"

With bowed head he fled from the palace and ran, dishevelled, towards his home.

Alone in his palace David greatly mourned, and shut himself away from all his people.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DEATH OF ABNER

THE banishment of Ruth had been a sore trial to David, but his body was strong and his mind and heart were full of purpose. He moved much among his people with Joab; and the Gibborim, his bodyguard under Benaiah growing steadily greater, were always with him.

His appearance in the streets of Hebron was the signal for dancing and singing, for the people had not yet quieted after the death of Saul. David did not dislike this excitement. It strengthened his position.

Ishbosheth, of feeble will and power, Saul's youngest son, as King of Israel, was at Mahanaim in the north with Abner, the great sarsaba. Abner fell in love with Rizpah, Saul's one concubine, and besought her in marriage. Rizpah had loved Saul, but Saul was gone and Abner was a powerful and handsome man and the friend of Saul, and her heart went out to him. At length she assented. Yet she wished the marriage to be without display. She was beautiful and of noble contour and was admired by all the people. Abner was overjoyed, and with only a priest and her sons by Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and two of Abner's staff present, they were married.

When the weak and suspicious Ishbosheth heard of the marriage he at once sent for Abner and harshly rebuked him for having married Rizpah. He declared it was because of Saul's sons and he had designs on his throne! Abner's mind revolted. He had never admired or cared for Ishbosheth and had made him King because he loved Saul, though he knew well that David was by far the greater man. This insult enraged him. He would strike hard now.

"The army under me has put thee here and kept thee here, O Ishbosheth! Am I a dog's head that thou chargest me concerning this woman? So do God to Abner and more also if I do not now set up the throne of David over Israel from Dan to Beersheba!"

Ishbosheth, of little intelligence and feeble in character, found no answer. He was losing the great prop of his throne. He held out his hands in entreaty. "I wronged thee, Abner. I pray thee, be my friend!"

"Nay, never shall I lead thy forces again! I go to a man who can rule."

Ignoring the despair of Ishbosheth, Abner left the palace and went straight to Rizpah. She met him with concerned eyes—she saw the anger in his face.

"I have left Ishbosheth for ever. He berated me for marrying thee—designs upon his throne, through thy sons!"

Rizpah's eyes showed fire. "My sons by Saul! It was never in thy thought or mine. Ishbosheth is but a sliver from the trunk of Saul. He is a fragment of Israel, a feather in the wind."

"I go to David, King of Judah!"

Rizpah looked at him with sad yet approving eyes. Ishbosheth was Saul's son, and she cared for him as such, but she knew the man was feeble as a ruler.

"Art thou glad to go to David?" Abner asked.

"I am true to Saul's memory, and so art thou, but the path thou wilt now tread means greater glory, and David will be King of Israel." She laid a hand upon his shoulder. "Saul

was very dear to me in the first years, then he became hard and strange and cruel, and my heart was saddened. I can never love thee as I loved him, but I love thee deeply, Abner—thou art a garden of peace to me." She drew herself up firmly. "And the sons of Saul, they are the well-springs of my life!"

Abner kissed her pale cheeks. "I shall send messengers to David now. They shall have freedom to speak for me. I shall choose them wisely; they shall know my mind. We will live quietly here till word comes from David."

In his palace David learned that Jerad had gone from his court and had returned to his people at Askelon to report to his general. David had sent for Leah and had told her this, adding that Jerad would report naught that could injure David or his cause. He then questioned her about Jerad's return and their marriage. Leah said she did not think of marriage with one who was of the foes of Israel. She held herself well in hand, and David admired her reticence and self-control. His eyes searched hers, but he only saw resolution and the true thing in them. It did not shock him that she loved this foreigner, for he had more than one foreigner in his high officers of the army—Ittai, the Philistine, and later he would have Uriah, the Hittite. The good of his people was his only thought. So he smiled at Leah and took her hand in his. As he did so, there came a noise through the window, and David, looking out, said: "Foreign messengers!" He called Benaiah and bade him bring the strangers.

Presently, dusty and worn, the envoys came.

David raised his spear in greeting: "Welcome, ye beloved of the Lord!"

Sihan, the chief messenger, replied: "O King, live a thousand years! We come from Mahanaim, in the name of Abner, the sarsaba. Ishbosheth evilly rebuked Abner for marrying Rizpah, who he said had designs on his throne through her sons by Saul, and Abner resented the charge. He now says

to thee, 'Make league with me. My hand shall bring all Israel to thee!' This is the word of Abner."

David, though inwardly stirred and pleased, looked round at Joab and his brothers and Leah and Lokman, then quietly said: "I will league with Abner, but only if he brings Michal, my wife, to me."

The messengers looked anxiously at each other. David seeing this stalwartly spoke. "Take these terms or reject them; there are no other."

Sihan, the chief envoy, bowed low after brief whispered consulation with his friends. "Thy will shall prevail. Thy wife Michal shall come to thee."

David's smile in response won their hearts. He was inwardly elated. He said to the messengers: "Behold, I will make a feast for ye," and with due ceremony and with singing and dancing of the people, he passed them over to Joab.

Abner received David's message in his home. He happily smiled at Rizpah. "Michal shall return to him."

Taking fifty men, he went to the house of Phalti, the son of Laish, asking for Michal. By instinct Michal knew the cause of his coming and her face lighted before she heard David's message. Phalti had been a good husband. She had lived at peace with him, but she had never been happy.

"Michal, King David sends for thee," said Abner.

Her eyes had the dawn of her days in them. Quietly, though with trembling hands, she said: "I go with thee to David." She had known that Abner had left Ishbosheth, who dared not punish him.

The oldest of Michal's women, Shebesh, who had heard their talk and who liked not Ishbosheth, said: "We are glad, Princess. We follow thee to Hebron!"

Phalti entered. Michal went to him and quietly told him all. His figure trembled; her words struck him hard. "Thou dost tell me this with no heart for me. My heart and soul are thine. After all these years wilt thou leave me who loves

thee? Thou art my only wife. David has many wives—wilt thou join them, Michal?"

She raised her head sadly yet proudly. "His other wives are naught to me. King Saul gave me to thee, and I have been faithful to thee, but my heart has been dead. I go to David whom alone I love. My heart is sad for thee, Phalti."

He knelt and kissed her feet. "Thou art the daughter of a King, the sister of a King, the wife of a King! I am as naught beside thee. Alas! I cannot make thee stay." He bowed his head, his eyes filled with despair, and he stretched out his hands in misery.

Her fingers gently touched his head, then she turned to Abner. "In an hour I shall be ready."

She went to Ishbosheth to say farewell. She found him sitting alone in deep dejection. An officer whom he had made sarsaba in place of Abner had just left him. He deeply lamented Abner's going. No cheerfulness was his. The world seemed deserting him.

Michal seeing his dejection and knowing his weak character, gently said: "Ishbosheth, I come to say farewell."

He looked up darkly at her. "Farewell—what meanest thou?"

"I go with Abner to the King of Judah."

Fire came into Ishbosheth's eyes. His hands clenched the arms of his throne fiercely. "Thou fleest with the traitor Abner to my foe."

"I go to my husband David—I have ever loved him."

Ishbosheth snarled. "Thou art the wife of Phalti. Hast thou not been happy with him?"

"Nay, never happy. I loved David and I love him still. Though I have been long from him he is to me the living centre of my life."

"Yet our father Saul hated him."

"Yes, but he married me to David—I am still the wife of the King of Judah. I go to him. He sent for me by Abner."

Ishbosheth sprang from his chair. "Abner the traitor!"

Michal gazed steadily at him and said slowly: "But Abner made thee King and fought for thee."

Ishbosheth's head moved savagely right and left. His hands clenched and unclenched. "Thou fleest from thy father's son! Thou art traitor too!" He half caught a poignard from his belt and Michal drew herself up fearlessly.

"Coward! Against thine own sister! I go to him who will be King of Israel in thy place."

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears and she trembled.

"Oh, Ishbosheth, our father did me ill, but thou dost me greater ill. I loved Jonathan and my other brothers, and I loved thee."

In rage Ishbosheth waved her from his presence. "Go—go—never let me see thy face again!"

Michal turned at the door. Sadly she said: "We shall meet no more. Farewell!"

When she had gone Ishbosheth stamped up and down the chamber in futile rage, but at last he sank into his throne in deep despair.

He kept his face calm to encourage his people. From his palace window he presently saw Abner and Michal leave Mahanaim, and he chafed to see many applauding them.

Ishbosheth had never been luxurious in his habits, and indeed was more civilian than soldier. He had a fiery temperament and he loved display. He had many dancers and singers at Mahanaim, and, cunningly, he summoned them with their timbrels and their harps; and in their soft robes, young, pretty, graceful, they danced before the palace. He knew it would stir the people and distract them from Michal's going with Abner, and it did.

Long after Abner and Michal had gone from Mahanaim the dancing and singing went on, yet Ishbosheth felt the hollowness of it all though he tried to hide his gloom.

Abner brought Michal and her women from her husband's

house into the valleys they would travel towards Hebron, and behind them all Phalti came sorrowing.

Abner talked everywhere with the elders of Israel, saying: "Times past ye sought for David to be King over you. Now ye may make it so. Jehovah said, 'By the hand of my servant David will I save my people Israel from the hands of the Philistines and from all their foes.'"

Abner had a fine presence and he had ever been popular, and the people saw in him a friend of David now. As he marched into Hebron with Michal, the cheering was great, for Saul's daughter and Saul's sarsaba came. David came forth and saw Michal for the first time since she had left him. She was still beautiful, but she had been long from David and had lived with a lesser man and something had gone from her face and bearing. David, quick to see, felt the difference, yet he welcomed her warmly. He had grown greater and bigger in her eyes. He led her to the palace and to her chamber.

That night David gave Abner and his men a feast. David warmly toasted Abner. Joab was not present, but David's brothers and Benaiah were. Abner said: "I will gather Israel unto my lord the King. Thou shalt reign over all."

David rose and kissed Abner on both cheeks. "Thou art the most famous and faithful of those who served Saul well. Thou art a great Israelite. Bring the people of Israel to me, and Jehovah's blessing be on thee."

So, a few hours later, they parted. Abner's heart alive with love for David, his spirit keen with hope. The people of Hebron watched him go on his noble task, and Abiathar blessed him before them all.

The next morning Joab came from pursuing a troop of Philistines, with great spoil. When Joab was told by Eliab of Michal and Abner he went to David and said angrily: "Why is Abner sent away in glory? Thou knowest this son of Ner came hither to deceive thee."

"No, Abner quarrelled with Ishbosheth and left him, and

he brought Michal to me. He is a noble Judean. Joab, thou hast been with me in my dark days, my wanderings and exiles. Thou art the mainspring of my life with the people. I owe thee more than time can pay. I would give thee honour all the days of thy life. None shall be close to me save thee."

Joab bowed low. He went out loving him but hating Abner. Abner had killed Asahel, Joab's brother, in times past, and Abner had been Saul's sarsaba, and now he was serving David and had gone to draw all Israel to him. It maddened the unscrupulous but capable Joab, who was brave and selfish. Joab at once laid a plan. He sent men after Abner with a pretended message from David, and these brought him back from the well of Sirah.

When Abner hastened back to David's palace, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak quietly with him. Then he smote him under the fifth rib and Abner fell at Joab's feet. "Die, thou cursed murderer! Thou didst kill my brother Asahel! There was no message from David. I brought thee back to end thee!"

Abner gasped. "Thou base deceiver! Thou dog whom all time shall curse. I killed Asahel for he would have killed me, and I tried to put him off and failed. May the earth rest heavy on thee and thy death be torture! I am the friend of David though I fought him for Saul and for his son. I love Israel." He breathed heavily. His eyes closed, then opened again. "Oh, God, take my soul to thy peace." Then life passed from him.

Word of his murder was brought to David. In great anger he said: "I am guiltless of the blood of Abner, son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house."

David ordered all the people to rend their clothes and gird themselves with sackcloth and mourn for Abner. So it was published in Hebron.

At the grave of Abner that night Joab bowed his head in silence and the people turned from him.

David followed the bier with his brothers and he wept at the grave of Abner. Great crowds gathered and people entered the town, and came to the tomb near that of Abraham, lamenting. David addressed them all: "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou!"

The people understood the King did not slay Abner, who had come to win Israel for him. They knew Joab was guilty and they frowned at him.

David spoke to the people from the palace steps, his family and the other Gibborim about him: "Know ye not there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness. They have slain a patriot and a lover of Israel. That one of my blood should have slain Abner tears my heart."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PASSING OF ISHBOSHETH

BEFORE Saul died at Mount Gilboa, by Jehovah's command, Abiathar said to David: "It is the will of God thou shouldst have more wives and children—mortality of children is great in our land. The seed of David must be multiplied. Talmai, King of Geshur, has a daughter Maacah. Thou shouldst marry her."

David made a protesting motion. "Saul had but one wife and one concubine, why should I have more?"

"Saul's seed is scanty throughout the land. Thou art rich, thou canst support many wives. I pray thee, seek Maacah, the daughter of Talmai."

By the command of Jehovah, David's spirit awakened.

"I will seek Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, and do thou come with me, Abiathar."

So together they rode, David on his white mule, to Geshur, and he presented himself to Talmai. "Brother, I have come to seek thy daughter Maacah in marriage."

Talmai bowed low and spread his hands. "Hast thou seen my daughter Maacah?"

David shook his head in negation. "If thou dost assent wilt thou summon her?"

Talmai sent his chief officer to bring Maacah. A moment afterwards she entered the chamber. She was tall and auburn-haired, beautiful and graceful, and the man in David responded. Talmai presented Maacah to David as the King of Judah. Maacah bowed sedately.

David smiled. "Maacah, I have come to ask thee to be my wife."

None ever saw David but was charmed by his manner, by his athletic and resilient body.

Talmai's daughter seemed to hesitate—because her whole being was excited. She replied at last: "I will be thy wife, David."

David knelt upon one knee, took her hand and kissed it, then rising stretched out his arms and embraced her before Talmai's court.

The next morning they went forth, followed by the applauding people of Geshur. All the way David gently made Maacah feel that life and time would bind him to her.

Going to Hebron they saw the splendid lights on the hills and beyond, and the sky shone with mauve and pink and blue and a tender purple. The clouds were like great castles behind which the bright sun glowed, and all the world seemed glad. On every hand in the districts through which they passed were vineyards with people stamping the grapes and clapping their hands, and pomegranates and figs and the terebinth and carob trees and the olive. When they neared Hebron David's heart was lifted up. It was his home and where he reigned

and it was a sacred place to him. There were the tombs of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and also that of Abner, where he had wept and prayed and praised. All around Hebron.

To the people's great rejoicing he married Maacah, and there came to her Absalom, his son, whom he would adore. Abigail and Ahinoam were not unhappy now. They knew he would have many wives. Maacah was younger and beautiful, but David was tender to them all and held their hearts in the hollow of his hand.

Time passed, and at length in his successful reign he also married Haggith and Abitail and Eglah, while at Hebron, and he had by them his sons Adonijah, Shephatiah and Ithream. There had been great joy with each of these marriages, and because Abiathar, the priest, blessed them in Jehovah's name, the people were content.

After Abner had left Mahanaim, the people became greatly troubled, and Ishbosheth forsaw danger in the future. He did not, however, set careful guard upon his palace, and there was in him ineptitude for leadership or kingship. He was not disliked by the people, but they saw he had little strength and power.

Rizpah was tall, handsome, with dark hair and eyes; she was slim and graceful, and with long hands and tapering fingers. On her mother's side she had the blood of the Moabites in her veins. She had enormous strength of will, power of mind and passion. She had not gone with Abner and Michal, but remained in her home with her children. Ishbosheth sent for her, his stepmother. His anger broke forth.

"Thou wert the concubine of my father, a great man. Thou hast two children by him, and through Abner thou wouldst lay claim upon my throne."

Rizpah drew herself up and said: "It is a lie. My children never had claims upon thy throne. I loved thy father. I was a true and faithful friend to thy mother, and she loved me. I have known no other man save thy father. Thou hast

broken with Abner, so shalt thou break with me. Abner made thee, and he will unmake thee, Ishbosheth."

Ishbosheth's anger was great. "Get thee from my court and enter it not again."

Rizpah shrugged a shoulder. "Thou art the King of Israel and I obey thee, but Israel loves thee not."

Ishbosheth raised his javelin as his father did with David, but she spoke scornfully to him. "So, thou wouldst threaten a woman, thou shameless King."

He lowered his javelin, and she left him and never saw his face again.

One day, after a discouraging talk with the sarsaba who had succeeded Abner, Ishbosheth threw himself on his bed in the heat of the day and fell asleep. In the town the people were restless and dissatisfied.

Now there were at Mahanaim Baanah and Rechab, the sons of Rimmon of the children of Benjamin, two captains of bands in Ishbosheth's army. They had evil minds and they were ambitious. Seeing the discontent of the people and the darkness in the face of the new sarsaba, with evil purpose they came to the palace. As they belonged to the inner guard of the king, they were admitted to take wheat from the palace, as they said. It was not wheat they wanted—it was the life of Ishbosheth. They made their way to his chamber and found him there asleep, murmuring to himself. With knives they killed him and cut off his head, and bore it secretly from the palace. They hurried through the plain all night and all day, while in the palace Ishbosheth's servants had found his headless body. With shouts they made it known, and the people of Israel mourned; they wandered through the palace and the streets, seeing no way to turn, for Saul had no sons save those of Rizpah, and they were illegitimate. All was in turmoil, and the sarsaba could only arrange the ceremony of Ishbosheth's burial. This was done with pomp, in so far as was possible.

Ishbosheth's body was buried in a newly made tomb with

some splendor, but with irritation in the minds of the whole people. Their thoughts turned to David, King of Judah. It was arranged that a hundred of the leaders of Israel should go to David's palace and offer him kingship of all Israel. So the hundred, led by the sarsaba, rode towards Hebron, many people following.

At Hebron Baanah and Rechab had come bringing the head of Ishbosheth. They asked entrance to the King. Joab, in command of the troops, said: "What have ye there?" They showed him the head of Ishbosheth saying: "It will make David King of Israel."

Joab was shocked by what he saw, but he said: "I will announce your coming to King David," which he did. He did not tell to David what they carried.

David assented and they entered excitedly, and David's brothers and Benaiah and Lokman, Hushai, Ahithophel and others were present.

Baanah and Rechab uncovered the head. "Behold, my lord the King is avenged of Saul and his seed."

David started up and looked up with horror on the head of Ishbosheth. He turned gloomily to his people and frowning, and at last he said in anger: "Ye evil men have slain the son of an anointed King in his own house. His blood is on your heads."

David's court agreed, although they were glad of Ishbosheth's death. David's brothers nodded to each other, and Eliab said beneath his breath: "Well done, David. Thou art just."

Baanah and Rechab fell on their knees, imploring David to spare them, for they had opened the way for his kingship of Israel. But he said sternly: "Ye have basely slain the King of Israel. Ye have but hastened what would have come in the providence of God."

They trembled at his feet, and Baanah said: "Ishbosheth was weak and bad, and thou art strong and great. We killed him to make thee King of Israel."

But David grimly motioned to Benaiah and the Gibborim. They seized Baanah and Rechab, who lamented sorely. Taking them from the palace, they cut off their hands and feet and hanged them over the pool in Hebron. The people approved. With great ceremony they buried the head of Ishbosheth in the sepulchre of Abner at Hebron, David and his court being present.

Presently, when all had returned from Abner's tomb, the hundred men of Israel, followed by the townsmen, arrived at David's palace. They were admitted. In the audience chamber they said: "In times past when Saul was King thou didst lead out and bring in Israel, and Jehovah said to thee: 'Thou shalt be the captain over Israel!' We come to ask thee to be King of Israel."

David looked with warmth at their battle-worn faces and forms, and he raised his spear in greeting. "I welcome ye to the court of Judah. Ye fought for Saul. Ishbosheth is gone. No legitimate member of Saul's family lives. I will be King of Israel and may Jehovah bless my rule!"

He turned to Joab, and the people were called before the palace, together with the army and the Gibborim under Benaiah. They formed a vast semicircle, and in the centre were Abiathar and Gad the seer. There Abiathar anointed David King of Israel to the applause of all. The messengers knelt at David's feet with joy, but he bade them rise, and he kissed Sihar, the leader, on the cheek. With spear in hand, he spoke.

"As King of Israel I praise the Lord, whose commandments are sure—the fear of Him is the beginning of wisdom. Never against Saul was my hand raised or against his family. Israel has come to me. Behold my lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea, I have a goodly heritage."

There rang through Hebron the cry: "Hail, David, King of Israel!"

CHAPTER XXIX

AMNON, ABSALOM AND ADONIJAH

ONE of the worst storms that this country of the chosen people ever knew had passed over the capital city and all the land. It was in the springtime and it would be the last tempest before summer. All the land was green and myriads of flowers injured by the storm could be seen. Jerusalem stands high and the air is so dry that a storm's effects quickly pass.

Zadok the prophet, who was versed in Hebrew life and legend and custom and was a man of impassive dignity, had the duty of educating the sons of David. His hair was streaked with grey, he had immensely heavy eyebrows and his eyes were brown and very intent.

On the steps of the palace which led to the garden Zadok pointed to the valley of Hinnom and the Mount of Olives. "The storm has left this land at peace." He looked the boys in the eyes. "We also are at peace, and under a tree I will teach you the law of God."

Absalom, who was thirteen and almost criminally handsome, glanced jealously at Amnon, his eldest brother, and said: "It is not always peace, prophet Zadok."

Zadok looked Absalom in the eye. "Peace is in the heart, and when peace is there our acts are not violent."

Amnon, the eldest son of David by Ahinoam, said: "Peace is in my heart; no violence is there."

Zadok looked at Amnon's full face and thick sensuous lips, and he felt that vanity had spoken. "If peace is in thy heart, Amnon, all shall be well with thee!"

Absalom laughed and shook his handsome head, his auburn hair glittering in the sun, and Adonijah said: "What mine eyes see is more than what my mind thinks," and he smiled out at the green hills and the sky with patches of clouds here and there.

Zadok placed his hand on Adonijah's head. "Time will come when thou also wilt think, but now to yonder terebinth tree." Zadok turned back toward the steps of the palace, and seeing a servant there he said: "Bring rugs."

"No, no," said Absalom, "not the servant alone, I, too, will bring rugs," and he ran towards the palace steps.

Presently they were seated on the rugs, and for an hour Zadok quietly but forcefully put the ancient customs and legends of the Jews before the intent eyes of the three. The ablest was Absalom, then came Adonijah and the last was Amnon.

Twice Absalom questioned: "Why strikes God's hand so hard upon his chosen people? Earthquake, locusts, pestilence and famine come. Why strikes God's hand so hard?"

"Jehovah's hand sets laws in motion and when those laws are broken these dark things come."

Absalom spoke ironically. "Then Jehovah is not a God of mercy, prophet Zadok?"

Zadok's eyes hardened. "Jehovah is just. When his children keep the law he is merciful; when they break it——" He paused.

Amnon, with a furtive eye, said: "Blood flows like the river Jordan."

Zadok's eyes grew stern. "Thy spirit Jehovah will chasten, Amnon."

Amnon bowed his head, and Absalom threw back his head and laughed. "In storm, in peace—why should not the human heart be glad?"

Zadok stood up and now he smiled. "Thou hast thy father's brains and humour, Absalom."

Then he turned to the other lads. "Ye have all great gifts. I go to tell the King of our last week's work." He walked back towards the palace steps, the three watching him go.

When he had gone from sight Absalom turned to Amnon. "I only am royal of us three! My father is a King and my

mother's father is Talmai, king of Geshur, and she is the handsomest woman in all Israel." He sat back, smiling satirically, and Amnon was furious. "I am the son of Ahinoam and she does not fail in beauty."

Adonijah grinned. "My mother is Haggith, younger than thine, Absalom, and, as the prophet Zadok said, mine eye sees and ye think."

At that moment Hushai, a rich and important Jew, came slowly from the steps of the palace towards the sons of David. He was a man of intellect and quietly proud bearing, and he was always finely dressed. In his hand was a stick of ebony.

The three boys turned and looked at him with interest. He had large estates, he had many sheep and cattle, and they knew that King David trusted him. His eye took in the three and then fastened on Absalom. In his mind passed this thought: "Absalom is the greatest of these three." Then he looked at Amnon and in his heart he said: "Amnon is the worst." He placed his hand on Adonijah's head: "Thou art the best of all thy brothers," he said in the recesses of his soul. Then he sat down upon a rug and the lads gathered near.

He smiled at them. "Of what shall I tell you?" he asked.

Instantly Absalom said: "Tell us of thy flocks and herds and all thy riches."

CHAPTER XXX

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM

DAVID, after due thought, laid siege to Jerusalem, occupied by the Jebusites, who were by extraction Canaanites. David's camp was near the virgin's fountain for sake of access to water, and from there he fought and took all the city save the citadel. That seemed impregnable. The Jebusite wall was twenty feet thick. The Jebusites shut their

gates and placed the blind, the lame and all their maimed persons upon the wall in derision of the King. They said the very lame themselves could hinder David's entrance.

David said: "Smite these blind and lame and maimed. He that taketh the city I will make my commander-in-chief and governor."

Joab, who was cruel and revengeful but brave and bold and loyal to David, willed to win Jerusalem. He found from a Jebusite traitor outside the walls the secret passage to the citadel. Joab and his chosen men in the night entered the cave and went down the steps, wading through the water in the cave. Carrying their weapons and a rope, they entered the tunnel opening in the back of the cave. They followed it westward for about thirty-two feet, after which it turned abruptly northward and ran for some twenty-three feet. Here the tunnel ended in a chamber, at the side of which rose the vertical shaft. This shaft was about fifty feet high. Some expert climber scrambled up, with the end of the rope knotted around his waist. With the help of this rope another, and then another drew himself up, until they were all landed safely in the little chamber at the top of the shaft. From this they passed along the upper passage, which gradually rose by a gentle slope to a flight of steps at the end. Mounting these, at last they stood within the city, and they entered unperceived. Only women drawing water used that passage. Lulled to security by the strength of their walls the inhabitants of the city slept. In the dusk of the night Joab's men stole through the narrow streets until they reached the North Gate. Outside this gate David had taken up his quarters and silently waited with his Gibborim. The agreed signal was given. The defenders aroused, rushed to the gate, only to be unexpectedly attacked in the rear. While Joab and his men distracted them, David battered at the wall, and at last opened a breach and entered the city with his shouting Gibborim. They met the Jebusites and slew them with no quarter, and David's army conquered Jerusalem.

Besides David after he entered Jerusalem were Michal and Abigail and Ahinoam and Maacah and Haggith and Abitail and Eglah, all his wives that he had married at Hebron and by whom he had children, and his brothers and Leah and Jerad and the shouting people.

The city was occupied as the capital of the new kingdom. Fortifications were added in time by the King and by Joab, and the city became the royal residence, and to Joab he gave control of the western city as Governor. From that moment David grew and grew "and the Lord of Hosts was with him."

Neighbouring nations were awestruck and enraged. But the capture of Jerusalem was greater than anything strategical or political. Those who reflect on what Jerusalem has since been can appreciate the moment when it passed from the Jebusites into David's hands. It was the beginning of the religious development of the Jewish nation. With its capture by David it received the vast impulse which went on till the time of Rehoboam.

After David entered Jerusalem as King, in a chamber of the palace, Lokman said: "They sang once at Bethlehem of a city with gates, and thou hast lifted them up, David."

Putting a hand on Lokman's shoulder, David said: "The gates, Jehovah hath lifted them. Thou art a star in my life, Ethiop."

Lokman bowed low. "Thy life shall never be dark, David. Thy star shall shine till thou hast made Israel great."

"Thou hast a tongue like a scimitar."

"I speak the truth; in things concerning me not I am silent."

The day passed after the capture of Jerusalem, and David was busy with Joab making arrangements for the government of the two cities. David would send criers through the city to say that the Jebusites could remain in peace in what was now the Jewish capital. Alone in his chamber he had written out the words the criers should use. As he was reading them

Leah entered and came to him. She had a purpose before her.

David looked up and gladly welcomed her. "Thy mind keeps tune with mine. I meant to send for thee, Leah, and thou hast come!"

"The Jebusites have been greatly killed, but many remain."

"Many, what then, Leah?"

"Thou hast ever let me speak my mind."

David, very tired after his battle of conquest and the hard day's work, said: "Ah, I know thee! Thou wouldst ask for mercy to the Jebusites! Here is my word which will be sent abroad tomorrow telling the Jebusites to dwell in peace here. Is not that thy mind?"

"It is one reason why I came to thee. Great kings in the hour of victory sometimes forget that besides justice there is mercy. Thou dost not forget!" Leah looked anxiously at him. "I am uneasy. Thou hast no guards in the hall outside the door, and the Jebusite hate thee."

"I will have no guards. That has been my order. Thou hast an apprehensive mind. Nay, nay, all is well!"

Leah's forehead gathered. "Love sees danger with invisible eyes. It is my soul that feels."

David took her hand. "I understand. Tomorrow I will have guards placed in the hall. I prize thy care for me!"

She shook her head. "But now—now!"

"Nay, nay, not now—tomorrow. That is my covenant with thee."

Leah turned to go, but David said to her: "Wilt thou not cover me with this rug while I lie down to sleep. It has been a heavy day."

He lay on his bed and she covered him with the rug, and he turned on his side facing the curtained door. She stood and looked at him for a time. Then his eyes closed and she went to the door. Somehow her spirit was still disturbed. David was now sound asleep. It was in her mind to wake him and warn him again, but she did not do so. With a

restless feeling she left the room and went to her own chamber. There she prepared for bed, but the same disturbing thought came again. She walked about, then looked out in the hall, but no one was there. For long she sat in reverie, and then she was startled by a stealthy footstep in the hall. The moon was shining, and a ray of light showed a figure moving softly along the wall. She moved silently but swiftly after. The figure paused at David's door, and she saw it was a Jebusite. She rushed forward with a cry. The figure turned and raised a knife. She seized his arm to prevent his killing her. David had heard her cry. With a dagger he ran to the door. Leah held the Jebusite's arm and struggled with him.

There was hatred in the Jebusite's face when he saw the King. "Thou hast spoiled my people, thou dog of Israel!"

David instantly struck his breast with a dagger, and the knife fell from the Jebusite's hand. With a cry of choking fury he fell dead upon the floor.

Now the hall swiftly filled, and Benaiah with his Gibborim came. Leah was standing by the wall, her face in her hands, her body trembling. Pointing to the dead Jebusite, David said: "Henceforth there must ever be guards outside my chamber. This foe would have killed me. Throw his body on the plains of Ephriam for the vultures to strip it to the bones."

His wives and his brothers hurried in to him and came close, and they were all agitated. David watched the body of the Jebusite carried from the hall. He saw Benaiah place the guards. He turned to all and gave a gesture of dismissal. With anxious faces they turned to look at him as they retired. Then David took Leah's hand and kissed her. "Thou hast saved my life, Leah." She sadly shook her head in protest.

Nethaneel came up to Leah and in his eyes was moisture. He murmured something, she knew not what. Leah looked at him. Her face suffused. "Thou hast a heart—thou hast a heart!" she said. He clasped her hands in his and turned his head away. David saw it and was glad.

Leah passed slowly to her own chamber and the guards saluted her.

David then lay down and quietly slept till morning. He did not hear the happy chanting all night in the streets.

When the Philistines heard that David was King over Israel they came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. David heard the voice of the Lord saying to him: "Thou shalt not go up but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees, and let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself; for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines."

And David smote the Philistines from Geba unto Gazer. When he had defeated them he returned to Jerusalem, and after great rejoicing there he sent for Jerad. Looking at him with smiling eyes, David said: "I am no longer a vassal of the Philistines."

Jerad bowed low. "At last I tell thee the truth, King David. I am a Philistine—I came to spy, but I loved thy niece Leah, and I have fought against them with thee. I am now a Jew."

"All this I have known. Thou wert in the hands of God. From Ziph I sent thee for Jonathan, and thou didst safely pass through grave dangers. So I said: 'Jehovah wills this man to live.' Now, see, I make thee captain of my army," and he gave Jerad a javelin and touched his shoulder with a spear.

Jerad in amazement and pride brought a hand to his turban. "Thou hast known ever! Thou didst save my life! O King, I love thee well! Now I will serve thee to the end of all."

When Jerad had gone David nodded his satisfaction. "I make my foes my friends."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RETURN OF MICHAL

AHINOAM and Abigail, the wives of David, had been angry at the thought of David courting the daughter of Doeg, but they were angrier still when Michal was placed in David's palace with his other wives.

She was still handsome and she was tall and graceful, but soon came bitterness in her heart. She had been the only wife of Phalti and here she was one of six wives. Naturally able and mentally alert, she had in her something of her father Saul. He was uncertain in his moods and so was she. She was brilliant then, and beautiful; she was beautiful still, but something had gone from her. Life apart from David with a commonplace man had robbed her of her finer fire.

A few days after her return, when David had met her with outstretched arms, there came the first break in their understanding. He said:

"Jerusalem is my capital and I shall reign well, for the hand of God is with me!"

"I shall reign with thee, David?" she said, tentatively, but with a slight rasp in her voice.

His face hardened. "I only shall reign as King of Israel. Thou must see that Israel can be ruled by but one mind, not by many." Again his expression changed. "Thou wert my first wife, Michal. I recall the morning after we were wed, when from the roof I looked out upon the city and the people and saw great dangers but final triumph over all my foes. Looking at thee, I said to myself: 'I keep my love in a garden of cucumbers fenced about me with good commendable trees.' Thou didst not know it, but I stooped and kissed thee, and thou didst not awaken." His eyes became shaded. "Michal, thou hast not awakened yet. Thy mind

and soul are in darkness. Thou dost not understand my task."

Michal's face steadied. "I know thy greatness, David. I had all thy heart, but it is not all mine now." Her face flushed. "Others are between thee and me."

Suddenly emotion broke down barriers of restraint. Her face flashed, her breast heaved, her arms stretched out. "Curses on him that stole me from thee at the command of Saul. I was with thee and thou with me, but when Doeg carried me off in the night, the light of life dimmed for me. Time dropped its curtains on my hopes. Thou wert an exile and I also from my father's home. I would have followed thee to Engedi but thou didst forbid it. Thou didst then break my life asunder. When thy feet turned towards Engedi, my heart almost burst with the agony of foreseeing. O David, O my King, all is broken! All changed!"

Her hands fell down. The colour passed from her face and left it pale. Her lips trembled. She sank upon the floor in her distress.

He looked at her with saddened eyes and aching heart. She was not to him, alas, what once she was. She could not be the only woman in his life, and by her lack of understanding she had driven a wedge between him and her soul. He stooped over and said quietly:

"I love thee, Michal—thou wert the only star in my sky. I love thee still, but my sky hath other lights."

Her impulse was to rush at him and strike him, but she did not. She was the daughter of a King, the wife of a King, and she knew he had changed from what he had been. She got slowly to her feet. Her eyes were troubled, but she ruled herself to quietness.

"Let there be peace between us, David," she said, and turned away.

He looked after her in sorrow. "Let there be peace," he said.

When she was gone Lokman came. Watching Michal

go, he said: "It takes many bees to make one hive, David. The full hive makes much honey."

David looked at him as a King ever looks on the wise fool who comments on his life. "Thou hast placed a stone of ebony in my crown, Ethiop. It shines bright—life opens out as thou didst say. Get thee gone. Thou art the truest being in all my court save one." He meant Leah.

He sat down, and as he sat brooding there came to him Abiathar. The King looked inquiringly at him.

"I have come, O King, to ask thee to bring the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Abinadab in Gibeah. Without the Ark thy Kingdom shall not remain strong. The conquests are due to this symbol of Jehovah, who has been thy constant friend."

David bowed his head without a word; then he summoned Joab. "Send the Gibborim to the house of Abinadab at Gibeah. They shall bring with them their instruments of music, for we will sing and dance before the Lord as the Ark comes to this holy city."

So David and the Gibborim and his army and many men of Israel went to the house of Abinadab and carried forth the Ark, and David brought the Ark unto Jerusalem with gladness, and with dancing and with singing. When they that bore the Ark had gone six paces, David sacrificed oxen and fatlings. He had girded himself with a linen ephod, like a priest, as the head of his family; and with dancing and shouting and singing, in which David—having cast off most of his clothes as was the custom—rapturously joined, they brought the Ark to Jerusalem.

As they neared the palace, Michal looked out and saw David dancing and shouting, and she turned angrily away. Later she said to him: "How glorious was the King of Israel this day, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!"

In fierce indignation David said: "It was before the Lord,

which chose me before thy father and all his house to be ruler over the people of Israel. Therefore will I play before the Lord, and I will yet be more vile than this and will be base in mine own sight. The handmaids of whom thou hast spoken, of them shall I be had in honour!"

And Michal, broken by his anger, turned and saw Leah watching her sadly. Leah said to her:

"Oh, what hast thou done, Michal! By thy unreasoning words thou hast broken's David's love for thee. Thou hast an evil spirit; thy suffering has driven thee mad. When thou wast stolen and in the morning I saw, my heart almost broke with grief for thee. But how can I grieve now when thou dost tear down the walls of life which were thy home. Thou hast made the King angry. Thy soul is twisted and stark."

Michal stretched out a hand. "My soul is in the Dead Sea." She raised her hands and ran swiftly towards her room in the palace. Leah shook her head. "God forgive thee, Michal."

CHAPTER XXXII

RIZPAH

RIZPAH had not gone with Abner and Michal, but had started later. Down through the plains of Jezrael along the river Jordan she went with her children and arrived at Jerusalem not long after Abner had been slain by Joab. She heard of Abner's death with no details, and fiercely went to David's palace.

David looked at her, deeply moved. He would have spoken, but she broke forth: "Thou hast slain Abner, the man I love. He was thy friend. He brought thy wife back to thee—Michal, the daughter of Saul. Madness is in thee, King. Thou didst slay thy friend, the greatest general Israel ever knew. Is there no goodness in thee?"

David shook his head. "Nay, Abner was slain by my jealous nephew Joab. Abner killed his brother Asahel, and he feared that Abner would be my commander-in-chief. I knew naught of Abner's death till they came and told me. While life lasts I shall mourn for Abner. Vast crowds of Israelites came to his burial and at his tomb I lamented. I said: 'As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. Know ye not there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel! They have slain a patriot and a lover of Israel.'"

Rizpah's face softened and her eyes changed from anger and hatred at David's words.

David stood up. "Abner's soul is now with Abraham. Thou hast suffered, but I have suffered more. Thou hast lost thy husband by a tragic death and I my father and mother more darkly. My father came from Ruth the Moabite. So, while I was in exile in the hills, I took them to Moab, and though the Prince pledged their safety they were later slain in his presence, for there were those who hated the Jews among his officers. As my mother died by their foul spears the Prince laughed at her dying eyes. They and Abner have met in the world above. I shall go to destroy Moab, and its people shall be my slaves."

His eyes were moist, and he bowed his head in grief before her.

Rizpah came nearer. "Thy grief for Abner is real! Thy words lighten my sorrow. Anger against thee is dead. The Moabites will deserve their fate. Slay them who slew Abner and live in peace a thousand years. Greatness is in thee, King of Israel."

She turned to go, bowing low before David, but he came to her. "Pray God, thou shalt live a long life yet!"

She turned to him. "In thine eyes is the soul of thy people, in thy hands is their fate! Farewell, King of Israel!"

As she passed from David's chamber she met Michal, whose face was bitter. They looked for a moment without speaking; then Rizpah said: "My husband brought thee back to David,

and Abner is gone! Yet thou dost remain. Surely Jehovah is bitter against me."

Michal replied: "Thou hast grief in Abner's death, and I have woe in the death of love. Thou art not alone, but I am! Thou hast children—I have none! *Surely, Jehovah is bitter against me!*"

So saying they clasped hands, the daughter of King Saul and the concubine of Saul, and then they parted, Michal to return to her chamber, Rizpah to go to her children.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ABSALOM

AFTER Rizpah had left, David sent for Nathan the prophet. Nathan had been at Ramah when David was anointed, and he had since then been prophet in Galilee, and David, who had ever admired him and followed his career, sent for him to come to Jerusalem. Nathan was modest and rigid in his devotion, a noble son of Israel and a godly priest, and he was to be with David to the end.

"Welcome thou blessed of the Lord!" Then he bade Nathan sit. "Thou art nearer to my heart and life, Nathan. I have had other prophets and seers, but thou art nearer and dearer. I need thy counsel. The Moabites are more hateful to my people than the Philistines. The Philistines killed all of Saul's family save Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, and Ishbosheth. Ishbosheth is gone and the lame Mephibosheth remains. I have long wished to strike Moab. I took my father and mother there and left them with the Prince of Moab. He promised their safety but he let them be killed."

His face hardened, his eyes became like steel. He sat in silence for a moment, then a quieter look came to his face.

"It is of moment to Israel. Canst thou find the will of Jehovah in this?"

Nathan shook his head. "In this, O King, thy will is that of the God of Abraham, the father of Israel. Strike the Moabites sorely—thou wilt be forever justified."

David inclined his head. "Jehovah is just. He hath given me power over the foes of Israel. In my gratitude I would have built a temple to Him, but He frowned upon it."

"It was not given to thee or to Saul to build His temple, for both have spilt much blood. Yet the temple shall be built by thy son, and in it shall the Ark of Jehovah rest."

David lifted up his head. "My son shall build that temple, my beloved Absalom! I pray thee, Nathan, let the house of David be blessed by thee."

"Jehovah hath blessed thee and thy house—what can my blessing do?"

But David pleaded. "Thy hands upon my head, and give me thy blessing also."

Nathan placed his hands on David's head. "Against Moab take my blessing. May the Moabites be cursed in Jehovah's sight."

Then David, peace and power in his eyes, rose and Nathan turned and left him.

David sent for Joab. He had kept him after the killing of Abner knowing he was a great soldier and true to Israel, and as King he used men as he needed them for Israel's sake. Yet his soul was against Joab. He now looked Joab in the eyes steadily:

"I go to strike Moab. Make ready."

Joab was startled. "It is a long journey. Our troops must travel to Beth-hoglah and cross the Jordan, go down to Beth Jesimoth, to Pisgah, Bamoth Baal, Baal Maon, Attaroth and to Bezer, where lives the Prince of Moab. It is the hardest trail thine armies ever trod. We shall make those murderers thy slaves, though they fight well! But the journey will be costly, and——"

"Costly! Moab shall pay! We mastered her under Moses or we should not be here."

"Thou dost well to strike Moab, who shamed the name of Moses! I go to prepare thy troops."

Left alone, David sat brooding and planning his campaign against Moab; then, at last, his mind clear, he reached for his kinnor. For a moment he sat still, then he sang:

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my tower and my refuge.

"He is the tower of salvation, and showeth mercy to His anointed, unto David and unto his seed for evermore."

Lokman entered as he chanted. When David with moist eyes finished, he said: "David, thy path of travel hath thorns. They will pierce thy feet and the earth will be richer for the bleeding. Thine eyes will weep!"

David looked at him sombrely. "Ethiop jester, only thou darest speak thus to thy King!"

David had made war on the Ammonites, on the Syrians and on the Philistines, and had steadily built up his power. He had smitten Hadadezer, the son of the King of Zobah, and he took from him great spoil—brass shields and vessels of gold. He defeated Edom and Syria, and the Lord had preserved him wherever he went.

David's life with his wives and concubines was serene. His proverbial charm in public was shown in the palace at Jerusalem. His wives did not quarrel. Each took her turn to wait upon him and each had her share of praise. Never was there a home where the wives were so contented—all save Michal—as in David's palace at Jerusalem.

Hiram, King of Tyre, had sent messengers to David with cedar trees and carpenters and masons, and they had built David's palace. In that beautiful home David's nature kept all at peace, and he passionately loved his children.

David had grave faults, but ever the divine spirit lifted

him above sins and shames. Not by goodness alone shall a man be famed, but by his struggle to be good. David did not always conquer his temptations, but he fought to do so. His psalms show the greatness of his sins, but they prove the exceeding goodness of his soul. He fell to rise again.

When David's commands became known great joy was shown. The Israelites were never so happy as when gathering their harvests or fighting their foes. They had been a wandering people and with vast passion they foresaw war now against Moab. They sang and danced, and dancing was the outer symbol of the inner life.

Jerusalem, with its heavy stone walls and its two cities standing high, commanded the whole of Israel. Joab was Governor of the city on the Western Hill. While Joab marshalled the largest army that ever yet left the capital of Israel, David sent for Absalom now.

Years had passed since Saul had died, and Absalom, son of Maacah, had grown up and married. Men married young in those days, even at sixteen and seventeen.

Absalom was tall and handsome, the handsomest man in Israel, and his auburn hair weighed two hundred shekels. David loved his son more than any other. In face Absalom looked like him, but vanity, pride and hypocrisy were in him!

Having kissed Absalom on both cheeks, David said: "Thou art dearer to me than all others. How handsome art thou in body! Ah, be thou handsome in spirit! We go to strike our foes, the Moabites. The soul of Israel is in thee. Remember, thou art the King's servant to be commanded as he obeys Jehovah's commands."

Absalom drew himself up. "I will obey my father. I shall fight the Moabites as thou didst fight the Philistines. The Moabites have stained the faith of the East!"

David's eyes lighted. "Truth is in thy words. Hither comes thy cousin Leah. Is there anyone in Israel more beautiful and true?"

Absalom's face turned hard. He hated praise of anyone save himself. "Is Leah's soul greater than mine or those of my uncles and my brothers?"

David shook his head sadly. "Think less of thine own self, Absalom. That spirit is not good for Israel."

Absalom, wishing to please David, said: "I sinned for an instant, but for an hour I shall repent."

At that moment Leah reached them. She knew David loved Absalom, but she read his unsound nature and his umbrageous spirit. In all his handsomeness he lacked the King's undying honesty, but David did not see it. He could judge men, but not his own children!

Absalom would have kissed Leah's hand, but, pretending not to see, she turned to David. David saw her with greater wisdom than if she were his own child. After a moment he took her hand.

"Leah, for their crime against my parents I go to crush the Moabites. Thou shalt go, and Jerad the Jew"—he emphasized the word—"shall also fight for Israel."

"Jerad was ever the friend of Israel." She looked at Absalom. "No man in all Israel so handsome as Jerad," she said.

Absalom's native vanity was roused. He laughed. "Thou thinkest of Jerad not as a Jewess, but as a woman. But has he the courage of his fulsome beauty?"

David laid a hand on her head. "Daughter of Israel, peace be ever with thee."

Turning, she left them, and Absalom shook his head in ironical negation. "She knows where the ripe fruit falls." He added angrily: "Thou givest thy niece what thou dost not give thine own son."

David was struck hard by Absalom's anger and selfishness. "I give mine own son a love greater than he understands. Oh, Absalom, Absalom, thou lackest that which Leah deeply has—unselfishness! Get thee gone, my son, get thee gone!"

Sadly he watched Absalom leave, and his body slightly shuddered. "Why does my heart misgive me?"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DEFEAT OF MOAB

THE greatest army Israel ever raised under Joab marched slowly from Jerusalem. It took them two days to reach the river Jordan, and David and his wives, Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah, Haggith, Eglah and Abitail, and the wives to David's brothers and Leah, and the wives of Joab and Absalom and the other women of the court went with them. Michal did not come. She was ill and stayed in Jerusalem, and David sent her a word of greeting and farewell. Happily it was the early summer and there was no rain and a bright sun overhead. When they reached the Jordan they found the water very low, and they crossed without rafts, save for David's women. It took a whole day for the army and the people to cross.

On the farther banks of the river the fires were lighted, and David ordered the pitching of the red and brown tents. Under them he and his family ate their meal, as did the whole camp, and everywhere the voices of excited Israelites were heard. It was three o'clock in the afternoon before David gave orders for the further march, and they came to Beth-horon. There they camped for the night. In the morning the huge army, with its mules, its donkeys and its spearmen with their knives, marched to Zoar. When they reached the borders of Moab, David sent for Rizpah.

"I go to punish thy people—and mine!"

Rizpah looked at him with firmness in her eyes. "Thou dost justly. The King of Moab lives at Bezer; he knows of thy coming. The Wady el Mojih, the river Arnon and

the river Gad are centres of great population. Thou wilt strike them sorely, yet thou wilt not wholly destroy them."

"Thou hast a sense of justice. I will not wholly destroy." David left the tent, and his Gibborim joined him.

Now Ahinoam, Abigail, Abitail, Eglah, Haggith and Maacah, the mother of Absalom entered. Seeing Rizpah drawn aside with head bowed they were moved to pity. She had grace and charm which none of them had in the same degree. When Rizpah saw the look of pity, her eyes darkened and her glowing face showed depth of feeling. She had loved both Saul and Abner. They were gone into the after life. Her two sons were now being taught at Ramah. She said to them:

"Peace be to ye."

Abigail stepped forward. "Tragedy bends but does not break thee, Rizpah."

Absalom now entered and understood the scene. Seeing Rizpah, whose beauty touched his sensual nature, he laid a plan to be alone with her. He looked at them all. "Ye have known Israel and Judah in dark days. Moab shall be vanquished and all the world shall see the rays of our sun of victory. Fare ye well," he added to the wives of David, with a gesture of courteous dismissal.

A startled look came into the eyes of his mother, Maacah. She said to herself: "Why should he dismiss the wives of the King? They have precedence. I am of royal blood!"

Drawing herself up proudly, she said: "We take only the King's commands, Absalom, but there may be reasons we should go and happiness be with thee for ever."

The other wives nodded. Slowly they turned with golden anklets jingling and earrings and necklaces making pleasant sound and left the chamber. Absalom was now alone with Rizpah.

He was married, but it was the custom to have more than one wife, and though she was older, he was eager to

marry the concubine of Saul and widow of Abner. He said:

"Thy great men are no longer here. They are beyond toil and danger. They have peace, and peace be unto thee, Rizpah."

It now dawned upon her why he said these things, and her heart did not respond. He was the son of the King of Israel, but she would not listen.

"Peace be to thee, thou son of the King of Israel."

Love was far from Absalom's mind; of that he was incapable, but he adored the admiration of women. To him they reached out hands, and he had rejected many and accepted some, and always they were interesting. But never one had been so beautiful as Rizpah. His eyes had the reddish light of passion.

Rizpah met his gaze firmly. "The Moabites have sinned and they must pay."

"They have sinned, but not thou, Rizpah, though thou didst come of them. Thou art now of our people. I am humbly subject to thee, the empress of beauty and charm. I bow down to thee." He bowed low, spreading out his hands.

Rizpah did not let him see the scorn and satisfaction within her soul. She scorned him for his hollowness, yet it pleased her that one who ranged all Israel should turn to her, no longer a girl, but with the heart and beauty of a girl and the tempestuous soul of a thousand girls. Such as she make and ruin great men, but she did not mean to do so and had not. Saul had loved her, Abner had loved her, and now David's son came with hollow words, but they flattered her heart.

There is in every man or woman a side to be influenced by flattery. It means that those who flatter wish to stand well. There never was a human being who was not influenced by appealings of affection. This was but hollowness and surface. Beneath the surface was what ruled the will of Rizpah,

who would yet prove to all time that deeper than a moment's flattery was the unchangeable love of her sons. She had prevision, she knew she was to see dark days, and this man could not help lighten those dark days. She was protected by Absalom's father and she had an unconquerable honesty of spirit. At Saul's court she had used tact and she could avoid this crisis by tact.

"When the King has conquered this people, I may listen to thy voice, but not now."

Absalom had too much self-love to see through the cloud Rizpah had thrown. "Permit me thy hand, thou woman of all the world," he said, and she held out her hand. He kissed it.

"Now fare thee well, and peace be to thee for ever, Absalom," she said, and turning, she left the tent.

At that moment Lokman entered, and hearing his step Absalom turned.

"What dost thou here, Ethiop slave?"

"What dost thou here, Israelite prince?"

Absalom laughed. "I come and go as I please, Lokman."

"Thou comest not and goest not as thou pleasest. Thy ways are in the King's control. Thy path will be hard, and the tree thou wouldst climb shall be the end of thee, Absalom."

Absalom laughed. "What tree would I climb?"

In Lokman's eyes there came a mysterious light. "Remember the tree, Absalom."

Absalom shrugged a shoulder, shook his handsome head, and his auburn hair tossed upon it. "There is no tree I cannot climb," he said, and he left the chamber with an ironic laugh and a mock bow to Lokman.

From Pisgah they came to Bamoth-Baal and Baal-Maon and Attaroth. Then they crossed Seil Heidan and in sight of Bezer, the residence of the king, they came upon the imposing army of the Moabites. David placed himself at the head of his army with Joab on his right and his sons, Absalom

and Adonijah, on the left. He passed word against singing and dancing. Silently, steadily his troops moved forward. His plan of battle was formed. His forces had only spears and swords and knives and bows and arrows, yet the army of Israel, great as it was, was less than the Moabite army. None in it, however, but had the soul of fighting and the faith in David's mind. Not a sound came from the Israelite army, while with shoutings and gesticulations and with fury on came the army of the Moabites, led by their prince. The Israelites were dark in colour, but the Moabites were darker. The Israelites were of medium height, the Moabites were taller. From them had come giants like Goliath. They, like the Jews, were descended from Ur of the Chaldees and they had the joy of fighting.

The fury of their onslaught was checked by a great shout which David had ordered to come when the armies clashed. He had spread his men so that they could, by quiet clever manœuvring, get to the right and left of the men of Moab, and his best men were on the flanks under Joab and Absalom. He in their centre, with Adonijah on his right, relied upon his own good fortune and the help of Jehovah to conquer.

It was with joy that he came upon the King of Moab, and he closed with him. They fought hard, but David was the lighter on his feet and the swifter, and with bitter words he fought and at last he smote him. "I kill thee for my father's and my mother's death, traitor. Get thee to Gehenna, dog."

The King of Moab raised himself slightly from the ground. "I go not to Gehenna, dog and son of dogs," and he fell back dead.

"Thou and thy people are in my power and I will smite them," and so he did.

Joab and Absalom on right and left encircled them and would have slain them all, but David forbade them. "Enough! Take from them their cattle and their sheep and leave them to the hand of God."

David was a great general. His tactics were those of the Plains of Pharsalia, and he showed in his day as much military skill as did Alexander the Great of a later time.

The slaughter of the Moabites was immense, and the people flew in all directions, but no women and children were killed. At last, with the Moabite women and children near, lamenting greatly, and such Moabites as had not been killed—one third of the whole—all were gathered before the palace. Dejection was in their faces. They knelt upon the ground in great numbers, and the triumphant Israelites did not sneer at them. They had vast loot, and they all were richer than when they came. It would be a long day before the fertile and populous Moab would recover itself.

Evening came and David watched the sun go down—a glow of pink and saffron, and in all the West a mist of adorable mauve and gold on a delicate ground of tender green. Far up in the sky behind dark purplish clouds was a white island, and on it a tower of white with an open door and a sweet light all round. David's eyes were raised towards it in mystic faith. To him it was Mount Pisgah from which Moses looked to the land of Gilead and Naphtali, and Ephraim and Manasseh and all Judah unto the farthest sea, the South and the valley of Jericho and the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. Then he turned his eyes towards Egypt in the far South where, from Mount Sinai, Moses had led the people of Israel. In that desert the commandments had been given, and the people had sinned by idolatry and he had broken the tables of stone and had condemned the people, and for forty years they had wandered in that land. When they had hungered Manna had fallen from heaven and been gathered, and at the oases they had water for their need.

Then at last had come their entrance into the wilderness of Moab. And they crossed the river Arnon at Aroer, and with mighty slaughter the Moabites who opposed them bitterly were slain. Farther north Sihon, the Ammonite King of Hesbon, sought to stay them, but at Jahaz he and his people

were smitten by the Israelites, and Sihon fled. Then Og, the King of Bashan, sought to drive them back, but at Edrei they were swept away and all their cities were taken, though fenced with high walls and gates and bars. The Israelites took their cattle and the spoil of the cities. All the land was theirs from Arnon unto Mount Hermon and all the cities of the plain and Gilead. And to Reuben and Gad, and a small part to the tribe of Manasseh, was given that fertile land.

Once again in Bezer, David turned his eyes towards Mount Pisgah. He saw Moses die alone at the top of the mountain, and a cloud descend from Heaven and surround the place, and strokes of light breaking through the cloud. As darkness swiftly fell, the cloud came down towards Beth Peor—

By Nebo's lonely mountain on this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab there lies a lonely grave,
And no man knows that sepulchre, and no man saw it e'er,
*For the angels of God upturned the sod and laid the dead man there.**

David bowed his head. "In thy going Jehovah's hand gave thee blessing, thou saviour of Israel!"

Then he raised his head again and smiled. "All this land was thine, and I have made it Israel's once again."

He looked out on all his people as they rejoiced, and he turned and saw his family and his great captains. His heart was filled with gratitude. He lifted up his voice and said:

"O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation. Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. . . . Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name. The upright shall dwell in Thy presence."

His brothers came near him, and Eliab said: "It was thy greatest day, David. Thou hast redeemed Israel."

"Our hearts are glad," said Ozem.

* Mrs. Alexander.

Shammah added: "The lion and the adder have been trodden down."

"Gone is the pestilence that walked in darkness; David slew it for Gehenna," said Raddai.

"Thou shalt see it there," snarled Nethaneel.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE COMING OF BATHSHEBA

ONE day in David's court, with Lokman the jester, the prophet Nathan, his niece aand others present, they talked of the affairs of Israel and all seemed well to them. The songs of birds came in and the soft wind stirred the curtains gently. David recalled the conquest of Moab. His return had been a vast triumph, and everywhere—at Jericho, at Bethlehem, in the capital, people vastly cheered. David's eyes now fastened on far space. He was planning future deeds for Israel.

Leah said to him: "Thou art thinking of Israel, and for her thy deeds have been great."

David looked at her inquiringly: "Why dost thou say that to me now, Leah?"

"Ruth, the daughter of Doeg, is not of thy people, but she has been in Judah's hills for a year. Once a prophet, by God's command, sent a leper to bathe in the Jordan, and he came out cleansed."

David sadly shook his head, then he turned to Nathan. "Is this true?"

Nathan bowed.

"I banished Ruth, as was my duty. Her father came to kill me, but when he saw my grief he dropped his knife and left me, conquered by something greater than us both. I would save this girl from her bitter doom. It has heavily

weighed on my mind. Seek God's will, Nathan." Nathan left the chamber.

Michal came forward. "Thou hast been good to the people of my father's palace. Pray you, Jonathan had a son, and that son has little on which to live."

David turned with shining eyes. "Thou dost think of others save thyself, Michal!"

Joab, who had heard, said: "Ziba, a servant of Saul, has been faithful to the lame Mephibosheth and has helped support him since Saul's death."

"Call Ziba," said David, and Joab left the room.

Then Michal spoke. "Greatness does not make thee arrogant, David. Thou hast a heart for those thou didst love once." They had drawn apart from the others, but Lokman was near.

David looked kindly at Michal. "In past days thou wert nearer to me than any on earth save thy brother Jonathan. Time and destiny have hurt our ancient love, but in my palace thou art ever honoured as my wife."

She looked at him with dry distressful eyes. "In our first days of marriage my life would have been given for thee. Other wives have come to thee, but I am not changed. Destiny spares none and in the end helps all." Then she left the room, David sadly watching her departure, and Lokman said:

"Destiny serves all points of the compass, survives all storms."

Mephibosheth, led by Ziba, entered slowly and fell on his knees. "Behold thy servant!"

David came forward, lifted him up and embraced him. "Welcome thou blessed of the Lord! Where hast thou been? I knew not of thy doings."

"Since my father's death I have been at the house of Ziba here."

David smiled at him. "I will show thee kindness for

Jonathan, thy father's sake, and will restore to thee his land. Wilt thou sometimes eat at my table?"

Mephibosheth, broken by the King's kindness, said: "What is thy servant that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I?"

Then the King turned to Ziba, once Saul's servant, who had been friend and helper of Mephibosheth. "Thou hast been good to Jonathan's son. I have given him what once was Jonathan's. Thou and thy sons and servants shall till the land for him, that Mephibosheth may flourish."

Then said Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants: "As the King commands so shall his servant do."

Gently David stroked the cheek of Mephibosheth. "Thou art not as handsome as thy father—thou canst not be so good, but thou art his son!"

At that moment Nathan returned. David's eyes took on an anxious look. "What is Jehovah's will, Nathan?"

Nathan said: "To plunge the girl into the river Jordan!"

David's face lighted, and he turned and smiled at Leah. Then he said to Joab: "Dost thou know where she is, Joab?"

"I saw her father as I entered the palace."

"Find him. With the prophet Nathan take Ruth to the river Jordan."

Unknown to David, Bathsheba had been at his coronation as King of Judah. She had seen him there, and at twelve years of age, and often since she had married Uriah the Hittite, but she had never been at David's court. Uriah had willed it so.

Bathsheba had not been happy with Uriah, though he strove to be good to her. He was a faithful husband, but his barbaric nature made him silent and reserved, and he was jealous of all that looked towards her.

It had been David's way to choose his generals independent of nationality, and he had chosen Ittai the Gittite, a Philis-

tine, and Uriah the Hittite, and he trusted Jerad the Philistine and had made him captain of his hosts.

The Hittites had been an Empire like that of Moab and Canaan and Assyria, and Uriah was high among his people. But once in fighting in the north David had come upon him and had been struck by his splendid appearance and his fighting, and had made him an officer of his army, with Uriah's happy consent. He saw that David would be King over all the land, and David was fighting the Ammonites, a heathen people who made human sacrifices.

As time went on Bathsheba became less and less in sympathy with Uriah. Something in her temperament was akin to David and drew her more and more to him. She was a faithful wife, yet she had the soul of the evil princesses of the house of Pharaoh. Ambition was her deep passion and it led her into hidden ways. She was ambitious for the greatest. David had just made Uriah second in command of his army, but she did not know that. Uriah was rich and had given her beautiful jewels and garments. Her house was next to David's palace, and the roof was lower and she often saw him going and coming with his staff and his brothers. With sudden inspiration, she willed a powerful ruse. Other women might be as beautiful in face as she, and they were, but not in all Israel was there so delicately formed or so exquisitely shaped a body. Thus with one great assault she would bring David to his knees.

One night she saw him restlessly walking on the roof alone. Something had disturbed his serenity. It was twilight time and the sun had just gone down. In the soft sky with its mauve and tender green tints the crescent moon gave gracious light, and peace was over all the land. Naught could be heard but the buzzing of the insects and the last call of the birds, and in the distant sky the evening star shook its petals at the world. It was a scene that would quiet the most troubled breast, but it did not quiet that of David. It had been pained by quarrels among his children.

Bathsheba said to her servant: "I do not need thee now, Rebecca."

"I was waiting to dress thee in one of these beautiful gowns given by thy husband."

Bathsheba waved an impatient hand. "I have no joy in such things."

"Thou hast had joy. None has worn more costly gowns than thee."

Bathsheba's eyes shaded. "All days are not alike, Rebecca, and I am like all days. Get thee to my room and take them with thee."

Bathsheba disrobed herself completely and got into the bath. There she beat the water with her hands, and David, struck by the sound of splashing water, looked over and saw Bathsheba naked. He knew this was the house of Uriah and he guessed she was his wife! He saw her ivory neck, her full breast, her slim, graceful figure as she stepped from the bath, and his heart stood still. Never had he seen so beautiful a body; there was none so graceful in all Israel. Now had come the one great temptation of his life. He could have many wives, but never had he taken the wife of another. Leaning over, he said: "Woman, who art thou?"

Bathsheba hastily threw her robe round her. "Who art thou, my lord?"

"The unworthy King of Israel—David is my name."

Bathsheba, in the temper of the great actress, gasped and fell upon her knees. "The King—O the King," she said, and drew her robe more closely round her. Her naked body was now hidden from David. He would have beckoned her to him, but she turned suddenly and, with a backward look, hurried away.

Rebecca, of inquisitive mind, said to Bathsheba when she entered her room nearby: "That voice I heard!"

Bathsheba shook her head ironically. "A voice from Heaven above."

Rebecca furtively replied: "The King of Heaven?"

"Nay, not the King of Heaven!"

A moment later, when alone, Bathsheba fell upon her knees. "David! David—my King!" she said.

CHAPTER XXXVI

URIAH THE HITTITE

THE night was one of terrible storm, thunder sounded through the mountains, lightning flashed savagely and torrents of rain fell on Palestine. Jerusalem, standing high, was greatly exposed to the fury of the tempest, and now and then could be heard through the raging mist the faint call of some drunken reveller lost in the crooked streets. In the flash of the lightning camels, mules and donkeys could be seen in the outer courts of the hostels and in the market-place without shelter. Louder than the cry of the drunken reveller there would come the hideous noise of a donkey raucously raging at the storm, while the camel, soaked with rain, silently chewed its cud.

High up stood David's palace, and in the dimly lighted room he said: "Thou hast eaten thy way into my life. While time lasts thy beauty will be my bane."

Bathsheba did not stir. After a moment's silence she said: "I have broken faith with my husband, and I cannot stay in the same house with him. Is there no way?"

David was startled. The woman belonged to those loose souls who have the brains and skill of Beelzebub, who fought the eternal God and lost. After David's startled silence she repeated softly: "Is there no way?"

"Our men fight the Ammonites and thy husband goeth as second in command."

Bathsheba with a soft hand smoothed back her hair, and with alluring fathomless eyes said: "There is a way."

David sat down and leant forward with hands clasped

between his knees. "Thy husband came three days ago, and I said, 'Go to thy house and I will send thee a mess of meat for thy dinner,' and Uriah left the palace but did not go to his home. He slept at my door with my servants. In the morning I said to him: 'Why didst thou not go to thy house?' And he replied: 'When all the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields and Israel and Judah abide in tents, shall I then go to mine house to eat and drink? As thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.' "

David paused. Bathsheba looked up at him with eyes half-closed. "He has a granite soul. He is as cold as the rocks of our native hills. He has loyalty to the Holy Land, but his human side is like the Dead Sea—it is not good to drink." She laughed scornfully.

David touched her cheek. "I understand. Thou wilt now go back to thy home. Thou wilt not find Uriah there."

She knelt at David's feet. "Thy will controls my life.—There is no other way."

David looked at her with almost shuddering comprehension. "Thou art beautiful and thy wisdom is the greatest in all the world!" He drew her to his breast and kissed her shining hair, her arms clasped his body and her life entombed him. She did not know save indirectly what he meant to do, and he was King and his will was law. When she raised her head, a smile was at her lips.

"Thou wilt not slay him, nor will thy servants; yet I shall be free, and when my mourning is ended I will knock at thy palace door."

He took her head in his two hands. "Thy child by me shall inherit my throne."

Her heart thumped madly and a flush crept up to her hair. Her plans were coming true. She shook her head. "I never had a child by Uriah, but I will have a child by thee—the greatest King in all the world."

She could have said naught so powerful in her favour as these words. He was not a vain man, yet there was pride

in him—in his kingship, in his rule, in his people. He foresaw the way to rid himself of one who stood black across the white path of his happiness, and the world could not say his hand did the deed.

The woman understood. She had the gifts of her kind—divination of human purposes. She knew when she and David met again the head of her home would be silent as doves in a storm.

She left the palace by a secret door and found her own home.

The next day David summoned Uriah to him. "Tarry ye here today and tomorrow I will let thee go. Thou shalt dine with me." So it was, and Uriah, greatly complimented, ate and drank. Then he lay on his bed near the lesser officers of his lord, and went not to his home. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, sending it by Uriah, and it said:

"Set Uriah in the hottest forefront of the battle and retire from him at the crisis that he may be smitten and die."

Joab was disturbed and shocked when he received the letter by Uriah, but the King's command must be obeyed. He gave Uriah the most dangerous place in the attack. The Ammonites came out and the battle fiercely fell. Many of the Israelites, armed with spears and some with swords and bows and arrows and knives, were killed in the clash of the fierce troops, for this was a fight to the death.

Uriah was in the most perilous corner of the field, and his men and he were assailed from all sides by the valiant and powerful enemy. At the very height of this strife Joab gave orders for the troops to fall away from Uriah, and Uriah and his handful of men were surrounded. But Uriah was a great fighter, and, though wounded in the head and the hip, he fought on. At last six men surrounded him and fought him, and his one arm could not defeat them. At length a spear-thrust in his face brought him to the ground. With a cry of rage he died, and the enemy tramped over him.

His doom lay at the door of his wife and of his master the

King, who had sent him there. It was a crime for which David could never sufficiently atone, but the agony of his mind may be found in the psalms.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgression and my sin is ever before me."

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hide thou thy face from my sin and blot out all mine iniquity."

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

This was written long after that night of storm and tempest. David, at the instigation of a woman, beautiful and merciless, sent her husband to his death. Yet Bathsheba would give to Israel the wisest king it ever had next to David. Out of the blackness of that storm would come the light of Israel. From Bathsheba Solomon came.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CLEANSING

"UNCLEAN, unclean!" was the cry of Ruth whenever she saw a human being approach. She was humiliated by the look of horror in the faces of those she passed now and then. Leprosy was the one disease which shut off its victim from the comradeship of her people. There was no priest to go among the haggard-faced, whitish, distraught sufferers from the disease.

From the day of her doom by David she had given herself

in prayer to Jehovah, had schooled her soul to the everlasting loneliness of ghastly exile from her kind. Beauty she had had, but it was almost gone. It only remained in the deep and marvellous eyes with which she looked out over the Jordan valley, over the hills of Hebron and into the blue sky! And at night into the shimmering moon with its corona of misty stars. No voice of her kind spake to her, her only friends were the birds of the air, and even the few wild animals seemed to know her tragedy and showed no fear of her. She needed little, and that little was got without effort. Now and then in the lonely hills she was near breaking down, but always she recovered herself, and she came into the broad fields and in the valley of the Jordan, where she could see the stony plains and on a bright day innumerable flowers and the happy singing birds.

At first her soul was weighted down, but her spirit almost ceased to rebel, and supreme resignation filled her being. Day in, day out, month in, month out, through all the long time she wandered. Something greater than herself had entered into her. It lifted her above her own distress.

Ruth lived lonely save for the comfort of prayer and the friendly comradeship of beasts and birds of field and wood. They seemed to understand; they were kind when all the world forsook her; they drew near to her and she laid her hands upon them. When she slept they prowled near like sombre guards, but none touched her. It was as though Jehovah told these ravenous things to be conquered by her tragic suffering. Lions, jackals, eagles, ravens came, and gentle birds in vast numbers sang to her in the day-time, making melodious the discordant world in which she lived. Here in her Judean hills a new soul was given to Ruth, and in all her woe her heart was lifted up. She saw the arid hills, never ugly in her eyes, the flowing waters, the storms upon the Dead Sea, the lonely, unpeopled heights, yet it all had grown peaceful, even beautiful, not to her agonized

mortal eyes, but to her quiet, soaring soul. She lived the life of a desert bird alone, but something in her rose above it.

She was calm, her spirit steadily faced her desert hours. More than once she lifted up her hands and prayed: "O God, who hast smitten me and sent me from my kind—bring back peace to my soul. It may be I have wronged Thee. O give unto me that which shall lift me from the depths where I sink. O, be merciful unto me!"

Her father Doeg often came, and in his face was colossal sorrow. One day she said to him: "Dost thou dread the Hand that smites me? It is Jehovah's way with me."

Doeg's grim figure was stirred with emotion. "Thou art punished for no sin of thine, but for mine. Thou never didst wrong thy King, but I did evil to him. Why should my crimes be punished by thy black doom? I do not understand. My soul is bitter."

She did not speak. She stretched a hand towards him and made a gesture of farewell, and presently she saw him, sombre and despairing, disappear over a nearby hill.

Three days later she saw him come again, and Nathan the prophet and others riding on mules, were now with him, and Doeg's face was like a cloudless sky. They hastened to her, light in their eyes. She raised her arms against them, but Nathan came straight to her.

"Nay, touch me not. Unclean! Unclean!" she cried in agony.

He took her arms in both his hands. "Come thou to the Jordan and in its holy waters thou shalt be cleansed."

Her arms trembled in his grasp. "I will go with thee," she whispered, and her face was pale and her lips trembled.

"Then upon my mule and I will walk beside thee. None but me must touch thee till thou art cleansed."

Nathan walked with Ruth across the sandy fields and at last, dismounting, they entered into the river Jordan. Raising his voice, the prophet cried: "O Jehovah, give Ruth the perfect healing."

A cry went up from Doeg. He saw the haggard look fade swiftly from the face of Ruth; he saw her body tremble and in the new sense of deliverance raise her hands towards the sky. Her lips murmured, but he could not hear her words. She came ashore with Nathan and went to him. "Father, O father!" she said.

He drew her to his arms and kissed her on the lips. Doeg now fell upon his knees and raised his arms. "O God of mercy and justice, Thou dost forgive my sins!"

Presently Ruth came forth from behind some willow trees in the robes they had brought. She lifted her face to the skies. "Jehovah, Thou hast made me clean. My life is Thine."

Then her father helped her on the mule, and the prophet Nathan rode on one side and Doeg on the other, and they all rejoiced. They turned towards Jerusalem, and slowly they made their way through the villages, where people shouted praises and where priests and students raised their hands to bless. All the way Ruth smiled. She was not now the waif of doom, but the child of light. Restored by God's grace, she loved all the world; she loved the people of Israel. Her soul was lifted from all minor things. All earthly loves, desires and weaknesses had passed from her. In her months of exile she had found a new spirit, and she was free from that which was worse than pain—desolate loneliness.

When they entered through the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem and people saw she had been restored, they sang and danced in joy. But their shrill voices, their clapping hands were only a dream to her. She was not of it; she was apart from it all. At last, nearing the palace on their way to Doeg's home, Leah met them. With a murmur of joy, Leah took Ruth in her arms. "Oh, my dear, my dear, thou art restored to life and health!"

She turned to Nathan and Doeg. "This day's work is as great as God has ever done in Israel. Leave Ruth with me a little. Later we will take her to the King."

Doeg, after a moment's hesitation, made due farewell, and

Leah took Ruth with her. Inside the home of Nethaneel, in her own chamber, Leah said: "Against his will the King sent thee to the hills. He would have married thee!" She paused. Ruth looked at her for a moment without speaking, then she said:

"My joy will be to serve our people Israel. I can love no one man. Agony has made me new."

Leah had dreaded meeting this girl. Now, with relieved mind, she took Ruth's hands in hers. "Thy life belongs to all in Israel. Thou choosest the better part."

Ruth raised her head. There was the light of an April day in her face. It was as though she looked forward to summer. "Jehovah hath given me peace. If I may work under thee, I shall be content."

Leah took her in her arms. "*With* me, thou child of Israel!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

NATHAN CONDEMNS DAVID

ALL Israel knew of the death of Uriah the Hittite, but Joab knew the inner history of that crime, and with loyalty he held his peace. For David he had steadfastly fought over long years, but this crime had struck deep against the faith of Joab, unscrupulous and bad as he was. One other than Joab knew—the prophet Nathan, and Jehovah had commanded Nathan to condemn David for his evil deed.

When Nathan entered the chamber David looked at him with troubled eyes and asked him to be seated. Nathan would not sit but said he wished the King's advice. Then the trouble left David's eyes, and at his request Nathan told him the story of a rich man who took the little ewe lamb of a poor man, with whom it had grown up and had eaten of his own meat and drunk of his own cup, and was to him as a daughter.

And the rich man took the poor man's lamb and gave it to a stranger to eat. What was David's judgment on this act?

David was greatly angered and said: "As the Lord liveth, the man that has done this shall surely die."

Nathan said sternly to David: "Thou art the man! Jehovah anointed thee King and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul, but thou hast despised His commandment, and hast killed Uriah the Hittie and taken his wife. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house. God will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house before all Israel and before the sun."

This revelation stunned David. His face underwent a vast change. His soul had been struck and his life challenged. The pride, the glory of his station, his great triumphs against his foes passed from him and he became humble. His sin now struck deep into his being. His crime was at Bathsheba's suggestion, but that did not lessen his own responsibility. He had sent Uriah to his doom. Bathsheba was now fathomlessly dear to him. She had the gifts of the perfect courtesan and the heart of the first woman who had eaten the fruit in Eden for which the world must for ever pay the price. David's face was still handsome, but tragedy was written in it. His eyes, that had looked into Samuel's on the day of his anointing, alert, glowing, expectant, had now added the vast experience of life, and woe was in them.

He said to Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord," and he bowed his head in humiliation.

Nathan now pityingly said: "Jehovah will fogive thy sin. Thou hast given cause to the foes of God to blaspheme."

David's eyes showed his gratitude. "God is good—I have sorely sinned."

Nathan added solemnly: "Bathsheba will have a child by thee, but it shall surely die."

Anguish was in David's face. "Must that then be? I will abide the grace of Heaven. Before my people I shall show

only steadfastness and courage, but my soul will be broken before God."

Nathan, impressed and overcome by his repentance, was about to bless him, but something within him spoke: "Let him atone."

In sorrow Nathan turned and silently left David's chamber.

When he had gone David sat long motionless with his head in his hands, apparently dead to the world. His heart grieved. He could not send for Bathsheba, but at last he sent for Absalom, who was near to his heart. The son he loved would comfort him.

Absalom, entering, saw the suppressed woe in his father's face. For a moment David did not speak, but he drew Absalom's head down and kissed it. Then he said: "My son, today has come to me the shadow of the punishment of sin."

Absalom's spirit belonged to the caves of the hills where no sunlight ever entered, yet he had a charming handsomeness. He had his father's gifts of pleasing the world, but not David's noble character.

"God's hand is ever merciful."

David with bowed head, answered: "Others have thus sinned, but not the anointed of God. The woman is my wife. I love thee well. I speak to thee as to mine own self. I have done well for Israel. I have broken the Philistines, I have punished Moab, I have conquered Ammon, I have defeated the Amalekites—God hath thus spoken to Israel in His holiness."

He lifted up his eyes and with deep sadness said:

"O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee, my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. Thus will I bless Thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in Thy name because Thou hast been my help. Hide me in the shadow of Thy wings."

Absalom did not understand. He had intellect and the

gifts of the accomplished hypocrite, but he had not the soul of his father. In David's repentance he only saw the tragedy of an emotion beyond his thinking. There was no greatness, there was little goodness in him, and he looked almost disdainfully at his father. No crime of his would ever make him show the humiliation and the sadness in David's words and face. Absalom had that tact which hides darkness by artificial light. He reached a hand towards his father.

"I bow low before thy greatness. Thou hast conquered all nations about thee, thou hast made Israel great, thou dost march to greater and greater days."

Absalom's words deceived David. He rose and stroked his son's face. "Thy faith in my destiny cheers me on. In thee I see a great captain of Israel!" He was about to add: "And thou shalt sit upon the throne," but something stopped him—his promise to Bathsheba! and he would keep that pledge. He added: "Nathan the prophet said to me but now 'The sword shall never depart from thine house. God will raise up evil against thee in thine own house before all Israel and before the sun.' I know not what he meant."

Absalom frowned. "If thou knowest not, how should I? Evil hath no place in thy home." He turned to go.

In David's eyes was an overwhelming affection for this recreant son. He placed hands upon his shoulders. "May prosperity attend thee!"

Absalom left David's chamber with a cynical smile. "After all my father has done he is still a child. He is in the day of his anointing again, simple and confiding. Yet he is King of Israel, but a broken reed!" He laughed scornfully. "The triumph of time is with me."

Now was born an evil ambition in Absalom. He would turn against his father, for whose great achievements he had admiration, but for whose present dark hour he had no sympathy.

He shook his handsome head with vainglory, and he at

once arranged for a suite of men to surround him, like David's Gibborim, and he began intrigue against his own father.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HE SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME

FROM the day Bathsheba entered the palace she set herself to influence all she met. She had rare beauty, but she had other rarer things: tact and overwhelming subtlety. To her, life was a dream of power. Bitterness was in the minds of David's wives, for Bathsheba had come to great prominence and would soon give birth to a child. Bathsheba knew it all, but she faced the future quietly. The child to be born might be a girl. That would be bad, for girls were not welcomed, and it would lessen her influence with the people. She prayed in her soul that this disaster should not befall her.

In David's palace people were always coming and going. Yet the Gibborim under Benaiah watched vigilantly against any breaches of decorum. The people of Israel, who did not know that David had caused Uriah's death, much admired Bathsheba. Joab knew the truth, but he clove to his master through it all, and he faithfully kept his secret, which he never betrayed. He saw that David would grow greater after his many sins; he also saw that Bathsheba, with her amazing qualities of intuition and decision, would grow greater with him.

In an outer chamber the red-bearded Eliab spoke to Nethaneel. "If Bathsheba bears a son she will be like the hub of Israel's wheel."

Nethaneel frowned. "What would the prophets say to that?"

"Hither comes Nathan; ask him."

Nethaneel, ever churlish and fearless, bowed low to Nathan. Nathan saw him with understanding eyes. "What wouldst thou, Nethaneel?"

Nethaneel's small eyes almost closed. "Will a son or a daughter be born to Bathsheba?"

Nathan's eyes grew stern. "Would I tell thee, if I knew! Away!"

When Nethaneel had stepped aside, Nathan moved on with dignity.

Eliab laughed at Nethaneel. "Blunderer—blunderer!"

Nethaneel frowned. "No blunderer I, but David is."

As the day drew near when a child should be born to Bathsheba her spirit became quiet and steady. Under all was her belief that she who had gained the palace by the back door would leave it by the front door to the applause of all.

One day David, whom the affairs of Israel had kept busy, came to Bathsheba. Bathsheba looked at him with deep tenderness. She loved him as few are loved in this world—as only such as she can love. He had always been the one star in her sky. That star had been lost, but she had found it again—not with the naked eye in the bright day-time, but by gazing down a well of sin and shame. In its depths she had seen the star shining from the sky of Israel. She lifted her hand and drew his head down. She did not speak, she only kissed him between the eyes. In her heart she was praying that a son might be born to her.

David said: "The people applaud me, my army is faithful, my Gibborim protect me. All goeth well." He stooped and kissed her crimson lips. "Against Jehovah I sinned in taking thee, but not against my heart."

She touched his cheek. "Greatest of all the Jews since Moses—to thee the world will turn in coming days."

David raised his head and closed his eyes. "It is written, 'And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a

governor that shall rule My people Israel!'—We both are of Bethlehem, Bathsheba."

The day for Israel came at last. Word had gone abroad that a ship was coming into harbour. There was great excitement in the palace, and at the news that a son was born to Bathsheba the streets became filled with excited people.

Great joy was in Bathsheba's eyes when she showed the child to David. David smiled, but a tremor shook his body. His inmost soul was troubled. He recalled what Nathan had said.

The palace quickly filled. Of David's wives only Maacah came to Bathsheba's chamber, and she had in her arms fine linen woven at her father's court. Maacah, entering the chamber, came slowly forward and laid the linen beside the bed. Leaning over, she kissed the child. Her own son, Absalom, would inherit, and her heart was big and kind. Bathsheba's face glowed at this act, and Maacah said: "God be good to thee, wife of David," and she stooped and kissed Bathsheba's cheek and smiled at her. Bathsheba looked up at Maacah with grateful eyes, for this was David's handsome wife and Absalom had her beauty and his father's too.

Bathsheba said: "Thou hast greatness in thee, Maacah. The linen thou hast wrought shall clothe my child, and I shall wear thy kindness like a shining robe."

David came forward and kissed Maacah. "Now Jehovah bless thee, Maacah." Then, turning, he left the chamber with her.

Presently Leah entered with Ruth and laid an ancient urn of Megiddo at Bathsheba's feet. Bathsheba whispered: "My heart thanks thee, niece of David." Then Leah drew the face of the child to her lips and kissed it.

Ruth had brought fragrant spices, and she presented them timidly to Bathsheba, who brought her head slowly down and kissed her cheek. "These spices shall be in the bed where my child shall lie—oh thou that the Jordan cleansed! Sweetness and goodness are in thy soul." She turned again to Leah.

"In some good day ye both will marry and will know what comes to me with my first child." She clasped their hands together. "Leah, thou hast been true friend to David. May I be true like thee!"

Leah leaned over her. "God will give thee truth, Bathsheba," and she smiled at her.

Abiathar the High Priest entered, went slowly to the bed and, leaning over, blessed the child. Bathsheba looked up at him and said: "Bless me, even me also, Abiathar."

Abiathar raised his hands above her head and blessed her, then he knelt at Bathsheba's bed and prayed. "O Thou who dost give peace and joy, give grace and gladness to this child of the King. From the porch of Thy Temple it comes; make it like a dove in Thy garden. Let peace be upon it ever."

Rising, he bowed before Bathsheba and the child and left the chamber.

Then Joab came to the door, and behind him were women bearing presents—headdresses, amulets, anklets, silver cups and spoons, urns and clothes of divers colours. Many of them were from the city. He said they wished to make gifts to Bathsheba. Joab did not enter the room, but Bathsheba's servant, Rebecca, brought the women to the bed. They knelt with their gifts and murmured praises and prayers, and Bathsheba showed them the child. With glad eyes she said: "Take my thanks for gifts to the child of the King." She drew the child close to her breast, and the women raised their hands in blessing; then they backwarded from the room.

That night the child became ill. In agony Bathsheba said to David: "Go, beseech Jehovah for the child." David went forth from her chamber, put on a black robe and lay in sorrow on the floor in an outer chamber and beseeched the mercy of God.

Abiathar came to comfort him, but he said: "Nay, God's hand is heavy on me." He would not be comforted.

There was sorrow in the palace and out in the city. It

troubled all minds that the King's child was ill. For long hours David pleaded with Jehovah, and around him were high officers of state grieving also. Among them all was Lokman. He saw David with anguished gestures pleading, and he shook his head sadly. "Bethlehem sinned and Bethlehem pays," he said.

"What sayest thou, Ethiop?" asked Eliab.

"That Bethlehem's prayer will not avail."

"Bethlehem prays but not Jerusalem!" His voice was scornful.

"Then Jerusalem will Jehovah hear."

Time went on.

In a humble street of the great city was a humble Jew whom David, seeing in shabby robe and almost blind, had talked with, struck by his loneliness and shabbiness. Seeing that his face was intelligent, the King had questioned him. The man had but one relative, an aged crone, an aunt with whom he lived. The man did not beg. He never asked for alms, but here and there a friendly Jew had helped him. He was a carpenter, but being nearly blind he could not work at his trade. King David had asked to see his home, and he had been guided thither by this waif of Israel. When David saw the aged crone who kept the humble home neat—a cave in the hill-side—he straightway made the man his charge and had him pensioned, so that he might humbly live without charity.

Now with the news of the illness in the palace the half-blind Jew knelt on the floor of his cave-home and pleaded with Jehovah for the life of the child, and his aunt watched him with despair in her eyes, for, with a woman's intuition, she felt there was no hope. She only shook her head and prepared their scanty food, but the man would not eat. His soul was with his sorrowing King.

At last the child died in Bathsheba's arms, and David was not present. His servants knew of the death and entered the outer chamber where David mourned. They said: "While

the child was yet alive he would not eat; he would only mourn and pray! He was lost to the world among all these praying people. How will he vex himself now that the child is dead!"

David saw them whispering and heard the wailing. He knew the child was gone. "The child is dead?"

"He is dead."

David rose slowly, put off his black robe and washed and anointed himself. They marvelled at him. They brought food and set it before him and he did eat.

Seeing their wonderment, David said: "While the child was alive I wept and said: 'Who can tell whether God will not be gracious to me that the child may live?' Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him but he shall not return to me."

Then he went to comfort Bathsheba. She was lying inert and anguished with her hair loose about her head, and all the presents brought to her child before her eyes. The child had been removed at once after death, and she remained broken-hearted, for her gift to David was now gone for ever. Usually she had self-restraint and reserve power; but the birth of the boy had weakened her, and his death had broken her strength.

When David entered her chamber she avidly read his look. It was all tenderness for her. He had been told by Nathan of the doom of the child, and it had stricken him hard. He had striven in prayer to turn the sentence aside, but he had failed. He was now composed and in good control. He stooped and drew Bathsheba's trembling body to him. She did not speak, agony choked her breath. He said: "It was to be, beloved. I prayed as thou didst bid me, but I heard the doom of the child from Nathan. I could not turn it aside."

She found voice. "Thou didst know then! And this is our punishment! Why didst thou not tell me?"

"I hoped to turn aside the sentence, and in agony I strove, but the child is gone. Jehovah frowned."

Bathsheba shuddered. "Will He always frown?"

David's face shone. "Other children will come to thee and me—thus God said to Nathan. Our soul is escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler, the snare is broken and we are escaped."

Bathsheba hungrily put her arms around his neck. "Oh, David! David!" she said, and hope was in her voice.

Outside the palace could be heard the voice of the captain training the soldiers in the step: "Left—Right! Left—Right!"

David listened to the wailing of the people, but above it all was the call of the captain: "Left—Right! Left—Right!"

"This is the training of our souls," he said softly, and her arms tightened round his neck.

CHAPTER XL

BENAIAH

DAVID did not yet know that Ruth's cleansing had made Doeg his everlasting friend. A great change had come over Doeg. No one would have recognized this man with shining bearded face and small brown eyes as the evil tool of Saul. He was happy in Ruth's recovery and in his home. Sherah, his sister, was still alive.

The sins, sorrows and sufferings of Israel and Judah were near to Ruth's soul. Not a voice wept, not a hand stretched for alms, not a sick person was in Jerusalem, but she would try to help. The King on his throne, the starving child in the poorest hut were the same to her. She saw beyond the pettiness and confusion, jealousies and miseries of life, its happiness and its woes, and her soul reached higher than Mount Hermon. Then she saw Ozem, David's youngest brother, go to her father. Ozem laid a hand on Doeg's shoulder. "The sorrow of this palace will soon be forgotten, but not the

joy. Thy daughter would still be wandering in the black hills had it not been for the prophet Nathan."

Doeg lifted a shoulder. "Not only the prophet Nathan, but King David." He looked round upon the sobbing women and listened to the wailing without in the city. "Is there sorrow for this child? None! This is the custom of death. Wailing relieves the shadows that pursue us, and that defeat us in the end. No man was ever worse than I, yet I am now a friend of King David."

At the head of David's court was Benaiah of Kabzeel, who slew two huge men of Moab and a lion in a pit on a snowy day. He stood not far from Ozem and Doeg, and his eyes constantly went towards Ruth. A profound affection for her had sprung up in his heart. He had seen her often. He knew her father, Doeg, and he sought him now standing with Ozem. Benaiah was a tall handsome man with light brown beard, light hair and blue eyes, wholly unlike his brethren, who generally were dark-haired, dark-bearded and dark-eyed. He was over six feet in height, and was stalwart, and every muscle of his body was strong. He had no wives, but he was popular with women.

There were many beautiful women in Israel, and Ruth's terrible experience had added depth to her expression. Her hair and eyes were black, her face was pale, and her long life in the open air had given her exceeding grace of motion. Yet the sadness of direful months had given her a far-away look belonging not to the places where she was, but some distant region where her soul lived. There was always at her lips the glimmer of a smile never coming to a laugh. The smile had birth in her cleansing by the Jordan.

Not Benaiah alone but others had looked her way, and they were not the least of the Israelites, because Jahobeam, chief among the captains, and Eleazar, the son of Dodo the Ahohite, and others had sought her with longing, and though they were married, polygamy was an honoured custom in Israel. She had given no token of assent. They understood.

Through the senses the mind of man receives assent or rejection. Deeper than words is the sensitive organization of nerves and brain; and though the brain be limited and the nerve power not overwhelmingly acute, yet words are not needed, for the inner spirit tells the truth.

Ruth lived alone, yet not alone. All the people of Israel from the time of Abraham were behind her. She had all the people of Israel in generations to come with her, and above her was the spirit of the Lord. When she saw her father bringing Benaiah to her, she understood. If she could have loved any man, Benaiah was that man. He had gifts to make a woman's heart beat faster. Had she been sixteen, the entrance of this man would have meant trembling pulses and overwhelming desire that he should speak to her, but that would have been when she was a young girl. She was older now, she was only twenty, but her suffering and her tragedy had made her a hundred. Her soul gave no response to Benaiah save that of pleasure in his manly appearance and that he had proved a great fighter, not only of men but of wild animals. He was a man's man and yet a woman's man. He held his head high, yet not arrogantly. His limbs were straight, his hands were strong, and yet they were not spectacularly muscular, but they had power in every finger and the grip of Hercules in the palm.

As they came closer, Benaiah looked at her with glowing eyes. There was no adequate response. A slight flush came, for she felt what was in his mind. She was of Israel—yet she was not; she was of this world—yet she did not belong to it; she was of higher spheres. Would Benaiah have any influence over her? He had great gifts and the greatest was a persuasive tongue. Who could tell? Perhaps the woman in her would at last respond to his splendid character and vivid temperament. He was not so great as Jonathan, than whom in Israel none was so true and noble, but he was not far off from that vanished but beloved hero.

Doeg murmured Benaiah's name and Ruth bowed. "I

have seen him often over the King's guard." Her words were calm, her voice controlled and sweet, but it spurred Benaiah to ambition to win for love's sake this unusual and exquisite being. Leah, who saw the drama coming, turned away. She did not wish to hear, and Doeg withdrew also.

Benaiah came close to her: "There is sorrow here. Mourning is the custom of this land, but thou dost not mourn, neither do I."

Ruth looked at him with sweet sadness "In my year of exile I learned how to hold myself against it all."

Benaiah smiled. "I understand. I knew of thy exile and of thy cleansing, and now thou art a blessing to Israel. The poor, the needy know thee, and they praise thy name."

Ruth smiled serenely at him. "And thou—all speak well of thee—what are thy gifts?" There was a glint of humour in her eye.

"My only gifts are the sword and my power over men of my command."

Her head slightly moved from side to side. "Naught but success has been in thy life, Benaiah. Thou art among the best in Israel! Thou hast not suffered, Benaiah. It is not thy fault. It was not my fault that I had black disease for one long year."

All round them was wailing for the dead child of David. All round them played the conventional song of mourning, and out in the streets and in the houses the tragic ritual went on, but there was no individual soul in it, only the national soul of Israel. Some real people were here—Leah, Ruth, Michal, Rizpah, all of whom had suffered. In this chamber of mourning they were bright stars giving light to the night. There were only a few folks here who carried in their hearts the song that had led the Israelites through conquest and wandering and slavery into this larger day.

"Thou didst suffer sorely. But happiness is still for thee. Only in a home of one's own can there be true happiness."

"I have my father's home. It is all I need. I am happy there."

Benaiah leaned tenderly towards her. "Thy father cannot live for ever. Is it thy will to live alone after him? See, I am rich in flocks of sheep, in asses and camels; I command the bodyguard of the King. Shall one year's woe destroy hopes of peace and home? I offer thee all I am and all I can do—my wealth, everything is thine!"

She did not speak, then dimness came to her eyes. "This is the first time thou hast spoken to me, yet thou wouldst marry me! Love is born as life is born—we open our eyes suddenly on a new world! But I am come too soon from dark places to marry now. I am standing in the light, but it is not the light of Israel or of this world. With pride I heard thy words of love, and I say 'No' with sorrow. I beg thee, go from me now."

Benaiah straightened himself up and said: "I will not give thee up. Time will bring thee to me yet." So saying and smiling, he turned and left her.

Lokman had seen the vital talk between Ruth and Benaiah, and he realized the end. He shook his head. "Time is with thee, Benaiah; God is with her. God and time make eternity. Hold up thy head, Benaiah."

Though a jester, Lokman had a philosophic mind. He was the one man at David's court who could speak without fear of punishment. He would have faced death with a smile. He had that sense of humour which wears down life's tragedies and comedies to the farcical end. In all the tribes of Israel there was none with such control of his outer and inner life. He had no beard, he was slightly stooped, but his mental stature was like the body of Goliath, and he saw clearly the inner destiny of all. As he watched Benaiah and Ruth separate, Nethaneel, the father of Leah, came towards him. Lokman saw him moving among the wailing people, and as Nethaneel neared him, he said:

"The flower fades, but its leaves enrich the ground."

Nethaneel sneeringly said: "Is Israel's earth so foul that it is enriched by a fouler thing?"

"Foulness is in the eye that seeth, and thou seest, Nethaneel."

Hatred leaped to the small eyes of Nethaneel, and he caught at a knife under his robe, but Lokman did not stir. He had no fear. Nethaneel thrust back the knife. He spat in Lokman's face and roughly left him. With the corner of his robe, Lokman smilingly wiped his face. "The dripping of hell," he said.

CHAPTER XLI

ONE YEAR

RUTH was a girl of singular physical fineness and ethereal charm. Her figure was like that of a thistle-down which a chance wind would blow away. Her hair was black, long and wavy, and as the light fell upon it, it looked like a gentle spray of water round her head. Her eyes were ever shining and yet they did not truly belong to this material world. They saw with singular directness, and in them was a distant radiance like a glint of light upon a far hill-top.

On a certain day of sacrifice she was dressed in white, with only a band of gold about her hair, and big ear-rings in her ears. She did not like jewellery, but her aunt made her wear it, and she wore less of it than any other woman at the ceremony. Her eyes had lighted to see Benaiah in command of David's bodyguard. He was a man that all women of Israel turned to see, and yet he never gazed at one of them.

Benaiah came to see Ruth in the house of Doeg her father. When he entered he saw her, her hands clasped before her. They stood for a moment without speaking. Then Benaiah said: "Ruth, until I saw thy face, no woman ever moved

me. None is worthy to tie thy sandals, yet I beg thee come with me to my lonely home."

Ruth's face was gentle, yet composed. "If thou dost seek me as thy wife, Benaiah, it may not be. I have but one thought—the people of Israel."

"Giving thyself to Israel, thou givest thyself to me."

In the corner of Ruth's eye came a twinkle like the glitter of a tiny star. She had a sense of humour. "There are millions in Israel, Benaiah. I belong to all Israel, not to one."

Benaiah raised his head with a curious smile. "Why dost thou curse me?"

Mystified, Ruth said: "How do I curse thee, Benaiah?"

"Thou deniest the light of life."

Still more mystified, with inquiring look, Ruth said: "The light of life?"

Benaiah laughed softly and his eyes shone with tender feeling. "Thou art the sun and the moon and all the stars to me. Denying those lights to me, thou cursest me."

Ruth was silent for a time, with eyes seeing far beyond him; then she touched his arm. "I suffered in the lonely hills. Go thou and suffer too. I pray thee, come again when a year is gone, Benaiah."

He held out his arms, but she stepped back shaking her head. His was a truthful and simple mind, and presently, with devotion in his eyes, he left the house and walked swiftly away.

Ruth watched him go, sadly shaking her head. Presently she sat down in reverie. To her eyes there came at last the faint and misty light that had so fully been in his.

A year passed. During that year much happened. Benaiah and Ruth did not meet at all. Benaiah saw Ruth and she saw him, but always in the distance, and they did not speak. Each was living a separate life: Benaiah busy with the many military duties given him by King David; Ruth visiting the

sick, helping the poor and giving a hand of comfort to all who were in trouble or distress. Each saw the future in his or her own way. Each lived like one who wakes up in the morning and sees the night slowly break under the first rays of the rising sun, and then the hills grow glad and all the world become immersed in light. So their lives wakened from the night of sorrow on Ruth's part and of ignorance on Benaiah's, and slowly but steadily the change took place in the minds of both.

They saw the people marketing, the caravans of camels pass out from the city to the Judean hills. They heard the calls of the sellers of bread and vegetables and water, the steady marching of the soldiers' feet under Joab, the coming forth of King David from the palace with his brothers and his sons. They heard the priests calling the people to prayer, they saw the donkeys and the mules treading the narrow streets. They heard the chisel upon the stone, the saw in the wood, and the fall of the hammer, and they knew that under the King, in the city of Jerusalem and throughout the whole of Israel, the life of the people was broadening to a busier and deeper day. They saw the storms gather in the horizon, they heard the thunder crash and the lightning rend the sky, and yet beneath it all the people throve and the vineyards flourished and sheep increased and flowers spread over all the land.

At last Benaiah and Ruth met in an outer chamber of David's palace. For a moment they stood silent, and then Benaiah said: "The year is ended. I was lonely in Jerusalem as thou wert in Judah. Ruth, my soul is cleansed, but not by the Jordan—loneliness has cleansed me."

Something in Ruth now spoke for Benaiah. She felt she must be the central figure of his home—the heart of it. They two would work for Israel. Not one by one must the world be strengthened and saved, but two by two, as Jehovah had ordained.

In her eyes was the glow that only comes in the great

moments of life. "Thou hast not turned to any woman, Benaiah?"

"To none but thee, Ruth."

She came closer. In her eyes was the first look of love she had ever given to man. She touched his breast. "Thy lonely days are done, Benaiah."

With dazed joy he caught her to his heart and kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips.

"Love of my life and soul," he said.

CHAPTER XLII

THE BIRTH OF SOLOMON

THREE years had passed and in that time two sons were born to David, and each, like the first-born son, took ill and died. David's spirits became low and restless, and when each of these children died Nathan said it meant God's reproval of his sin for destroying Uriah.

Even Bathsheba in her beauty and growing power felt bitterly the loss of these sons and saw retreating the hope of her child inheriting David's throne. She said to Nathan: "Have I sinned so deeply that God will not forgive me?"

"His children and thine have not pleased the Lord. He hath taken them from thee." Bathsheba's body trembled. She slowly got to her feet and came forward. She had power in her eyes and she looked at him as one who would lift herself from the abyss unto the white plain.

"Nathan, I was not happy with Uriah. I loved David, I gave myself to him because I loved him. Surely, Jehovah hath smitten me sorely!" She bowed her head, but suddenly she changed. "No, I will not despair; I will give David another child and I will bear them and bear them till one be born to inherit his throne. Yes, I have ambition, I have

pride, and maybe vainglory, but I have come to love the people of Israel, and Israel is greater than all!"

Her hands were clasped together; she drew herself up with stately stillness now.

Nathan folded his hands upon his breast. For a long minute he stood silent, then he opened his eyes. "Thy coming son shall be in Jehovah's sight the heir to David, King of Israel."

Bathsheba's eyes shone. "Thou hast given a light higher than the sky to my soul. In my heart is now the one desire for a son who shall build the temple of God and be the glory of this land. Bless me, bless me, Nathan."

Nathan raised his hands above her head. "Thou hast deeply sinned, but Jehovah forgives. Blessed be thou in all thy days."

So saying, he turned and left the chamber, and for long Bathsheba sank upon the ground, buried her head in her breast, and with her hands folded sought to calm her soul and heart to the greatness of the fate lying before her and her King. At last David entered and seeing her in apparent dejection upon the floor, stooped over her.

"Look at me, Bathsheba."

In her eyes was a glow he had never seen before. At sight of her face, he said: "Speak, Bathsheba, what is it?"

"Behold, Nathan has been here. He said I shall bear a son who will make Israel more glorious."

David lifted her up and clasped her in his arms.

"That raiseth my spirit from the dust. O Lord, my God, thou art very great, thou art clothed with honour and majesty. I will sing praises to Thee while I have my being."

Time passed. A son was born to David, and all in the land of Israel were full of joy, save in the palace, where Michal and David's other wives, including Maacah, the mother of Absalom and Adonijah, and Haggith, and Abitail and Eglah, resented the birth of a fourth son to David by

Bathsheba, and Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah and David's other sons were morose.

There had never been in Israel a more attractive or intellectually able woman than Bathsheba. She saw far and felt deep. She loved David, and it was a joy that a fourth son was born. When David named him Solomon—thy peace—and held him in his arms, she saw ahead the glory and the triumph that would come to her son. David had brought back the Ark of God where it now rested—on Mount Moriah; Solomon should build there a temple enriched by the wealth of David.

When Michal heard the news, she gathered her sister's children and kissed them all. Raising her eyes she said: "If I had had a son, he would have been King of Israel, but here lies my duty—only here."

To the shouting of the people in the streets, David came upon the steps of his palace; surrounded by his brothers, by Joab and Benaiah and with Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah and his other sons near, he stretched out an arm. "By the goodness of God another son is born to me, and I shall call him Solomon. Praise God for Solomon, O my people!"

The Israelites shouted: "Peace be upon thee, O King, and come glory to thy son."

Absalom shook his head and frowned. He had long been plotting to destroy his father.

Near David stood Lokman and not far behind him was Amnon. Lokman turned and looked at him. There was inquiry in his eye. He said: "One flower dies, but this will bloom for ever!"

Amnon came close. "He will be King?"

Lokman shook his head. "That is beyond my time," he said enigmatically, and he turned to the shouting crowd and spoke no more.

Rizpah, who stood not far from Absalom, said: "I hail the King of Israel."

The voice was clear. Absalom said with eager vanity: "Who is the King of Israel?"

"Israel has but one King."

He fastened her eye again. "The King of Israel has sons."

"I hail the King of Israel," she said, and bowed her head.

Absalom, who was plotting against his father, took it as a tribute to himself. He stretched a hand. "We shall meet soon," he said.

She raised her eyes. "Time is not ours; it belongs to Yahwe!"

He shook his handsome head and laughed. He thought she might help him on his dangerous way.

Amnon put a hand on Absalom's shoulder. "We have far to go, my brother," he said.

"Not so far that I cannot reach the end."

"I say 'We,'" replied Amnon, with a slight sneer.

"Well, together we will make the journey," answered Absalom falsely, and they clasped hands.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MISTS THAT PASSED

THE time came when David would make his brothers rulers under him in Israel. He had found them ever capable and faithful and good fighters, but they were not suited as generals, yet they would make good rulers under him.

He called a council at his palace, and there were present Ahithophel, a rich and noted Jew, and Jehoshaphat and Baanah, Adoniram the superintendent, Sheva the secretary of state, Joab the sarsaba, and others.

David startled them all by saying to Sheva: "I will make my brothers rulers under me in Israel."

Eliab and the other brothers looked up amazed. This was a new policy of David, and it showed he had a wide outlook and did not fear sharing his own authority.

Sheva, startled, but obedient and faithful, said: "All shall be after thy will, O King."

David looked round on his councillors, and his eyes met those of the sage and elderly Ahithophel who came seldom now to court, for he liked not the marriage with Bathsheba. David, suspecting him of this, had commanded his presence, and he came.

"What is thy mind in this, Ahithophel?"

Ahithophel looked round the council-chamber. "Is it the custom to question the will of the King?"

David's face flushed slightly. "All custom fades when grave affairs of state are before us."

Ahithophel drew up his stately body. "Nay, sir, custom in a land of custom should not fade; but it is good thou shouldst make thy brothers rulers in the land thou hast made so great."

Somehow David's mind, most acute to inflection, felt the undercurrent of criticism beneath assent. Yet Ahithophel's face was honest, steady and composed.

"If I had vain thoughts in this, would I have called a council, Ahithophel?"

"Thou art fair and open in all affairs of state."

Beneath these last words David read the inner thought concerning Bathsheba, which was not an affair of state.

David looked closely into Ahithophel's eyes. "Thine is the mind of a great councillor, Ahithophel."

Ahithophel read the thought, and he was glad David understood. He sat composed and silent now, and none knew his real mind save the King.

David then questioned other councillors, and they all gave their assent, for they approved of David's policy. It was a renewal of the system of the ancient judges in which the sons

of prophets ruled provinces, as Eli's and Samuel's sons had done.

So it was that Eliab was given Judah, Shammah Galilee and the others different districts. David arranged now their authority and staff, and at last in the council there was a new sense of power, security and wide purpose. As they all rose in respect to the King when he left, David turned to Ahithophel. "Upon thy arm, Ahithophel."

Taking the embarrassed Ahithophel's arm, David left the chamber, and his brothers and his court followed.

CHAPTER XLIV

JERAD AND LEAH

ALL had been uncertain in the lives of Jerad and Leah. They met first in the hills of Ziph, then in the hills of Engedi, then at Ziklag, and in all David's exile and wanderings they had ever been not far away. Jerad had returned to his people more than once, and had come back. Such affection comes but once in all lives, and he was an alien, and his people had been foes to Israel. At last he had told David all and had been made an officer in David's army.

He sought Leah in her home, elated and cheerful, for he was now an officer in David's inner guard. When he entered her chamber, Leah knew he had great news for her. Her face was ruled to composure, but in her eyes was the flame that burns all other passions and desires into dust. He could not see or understand, and she did not wish him to do so. She was standing with hands clasped in front of her when he entered, and though she was outwardly calm, within she was like an eddy in a great stream, dragged here and there by her emotions, and they were tempestuous. Jerad came straight to her and stretched out both hands, his eyes shining.

"I have told the King my story, Leah. I am an officer of his Gibborim."

Leah's sensitive face showed the conflict of her spirit. "He knew thy story ever, Jerad."

"Yes, yes, but I did not know he knew. He spared the life of a Philistine spy, and my life is now his—I am a Jew!"

Leah's heart beat wildly yet she remained steady. "Thou are now a Jew. Yet thy birth stays thee from sharing our purposes."

"Nothing stays me. I have fought for thy people against my own. I know and feel the purposes of King David. I give my life to Israel—and my heart and soul to thee."

Suddenly he reached out and caught her to his breast. As he did so, she trembled and was affrighted.

"Oh, let me go—but you shall!" she said, and wrenched herself free. Her hair was not disturbed, but her face was full of fighting emotions. "My people are more than mine own self to me," she said with firm lips, but her eyes were glowing.

Jerad's face became bitterly sad. "And I have left mine own people because of thee!"

He sat upon a bench and buried his head in his hand. A new look came to Leah's face—he had foregone his own people for love of her. He was handsome, brave and young. She had quick perception and immense tenderness. She reached out a hand as though to touch his head, but she hesitated. She could not bring herself to do it.

By instinct he felt what she had meant to do. He looked up quickly and caught the light in her eyes. He drew her down beside him. "I have wiped out mine own people because of thee—only for thee."

She did not speak, but her body was agitated, and he could feel that it did not resent him. "My beloved, thou art all this world has for me. Wilt thou not care?"

She shook her head in negation, but she would not speak. Yet her pulses thrilled and a kind of mist came into her eyes.

He still held her hand, and it was cold in his fingers. The room was almost dark, and in the moment's silence they could hear the rustle of the birds flying to their nests. In the room itself were only those sounds we hear when we cannot sleep—they belong partly to this world and partly to the next.

Now he drew her close to him and her lips came to his. For long they sat so, and tears came to her dim eyes. With endearing words he kissed them away.

"I love thee—love thee, Leah!"

Then there was silence.

CHAPTER XLV

THE PESTILENCE

NATHAN in a chamber of the palace received the commands of Jehovah: "David has brought blackness on this land. His people mourned the death of the child by Bathsheba who shamed Israel. I have not forgiven him his slaying of Uriah. They rejoiced at the birth of Solomon, and now I strike his repentant soul. A fever falls upon them all. Go tell him so."

The face of the prophet was white with sorrow. He found David in his chamber, and Nathan gave him the grave message from Jehovah. When David heard, he fell upon his knees, his face in agony. "Oh Jehovah, let *me* bear all. Strike, but let the people not suffer for my sin. Spare them!"

Nathan said sternly: "Thy people suffer for thy misdeeds and even now the plague is upon the land."

David slowly rose, his shoulders bowed, his spirit bleeding pain and despair. "There is one way to end it all," he said with trembling lips.

"The way of the coward, King of Israel! Wouldst thou

take thine own life! Art thou David who conquered all nations near us? Wouldst thou be sinner and coward too?"

David raised his head firmly, his body straightened. "Then let punishment fall not upon my people but on me!"

Nathan shook his head in negation. "The judgment is on both."

David bowed his head. "Jehovah strikes late for this black sin, but He is just. My back is bare for the strokes of the lash. I abide His will."

Next day David heard the wailing of a stricken people, and he knew a dread fever was entering many homes. His face was stern, his eye alive with bitter sorrow. The excitement in Jerusalem was great, and the people of the palace were perturbed.

When David told Bathsheba, she said: "I only grieve for Israel and for thee. I have thy son, Solomon, whom God has blessed. God's hand strikes hard—may my son be spared!" She covered her face with her hands, then she drew herself up firmly again. "Alas! for Israel!"

His brother Nethaneel said to him: "All pay for thy misdeeds."

David swung upon him. "Thou hast ever been a thorn in my flesh. Were it not for thy daughter Leah, whom all Israel honours for her goodness, thy name would stink from Dan to Beersheba. Get thee gone, Nethaneel!"

Without a word, Nethaneel angrily left the chamber.

Then there entered Benaiah, captain of his guard. Benaiah's handsome face was pale.

David mournfully looked at him. "What wilt thou?"

"O King whom God protect and save, I have come to say that the fever enters many homes and death takes hundreds. I have just come from the home of a poor man. He and his family lived in one room. He lies dead, with his wife and children wailing around him, and his neighbours wail. As I entered this palace, I heard a voice say: 'May you have

nothing but ground for bed and sky for covering!' Another said: 'May your children be orphaned and your wife widowed.' Everywhere the plague finds its victims, among the rich and among the poor, among the soldiers, even among thy Gibborim —two have been stricken. Last night in one of the great homes not far from thy palace, one of thy councillors was seized. He passed, and quickly, and so they all go. It is not the people alone, even the homes of the priests are not spared— two sons of priests gave up their breath last night. It is not the people alone, but the sheep and goats are stricken too throughout the land—death strikes hard!"

David stretched a hand in misery. "Death takes my people and leaves me here!"

Benaiah bowed low. "Jehovah strikes King and the people —spares none, alas!"

"I know thee true, Benaiah. Report here every day. Thy task is hard, but thou art adamant."

Benaiah left the King, and with a small company of Gibborim carefully inspected Jerusalem.

The time was not distant when there would be many homes where no light would be burning. As the Bible says: "Unto his son will I give one tribe that David my servant may have a lamp always before me in Jerusalem." No Jewish home was ever without a single light. It was the symbol of daily being.

The sirocco was on, and it exhausted the bodies of the women in long garments, with girdles dyed with indigo or of plain white, and they trembled as they wailed. Now and then from the housetops the priests called to the people to have courage, to remember they were of the chosen people.

Jews had suffered much and they had stern endurance. They had been successful and prosperous under David and now had come a dark hour in their history. Only dimly they knew they were being punished for David's sin and their forgiveness of that sin, but all the wise and all the great

people of Israel knew the truth clearly. They lifted up their hearts to Jehovah praying that the black mark should not touch their lintels.

CHAPTER XLVI

JERAD FALLS ILL

JERAD was now busy with other Gibborim inspecting the streets of Jerusalem. He wandered through the steep and crooked streets, his eye alive to every doorway and every man and woman and child he met. He had only seen Leah in the distance as she went from house to house in her piteous yet noble work. In Jerusalem and in all the land, many people were dying of the plague.

In the streets he met Doeg. After greeting him, he said tentatively: "In the late kingdom thou wert a great fighter and close to the throne. I was a Philistine, but I am of the Gibborim now. Thou art not fifty—strength is still in thy body!"

Doeg nodded. "We have both been foes of the King. Ruth's cleansing has made me his friend."

"Ay, greatness is in King David. Come with me to Benaiah. The Gibborim for thee."

Doeg's small eyes took on a troubled look. He raised his head and stood still. "Some nights ago I had a horrible dream. I saw a city like this with lightless houses—that means death, desert and loneliness. I have lived in the desert by week, by month, sometimes alone—I am in the desert again." He shook his head gloomily. "My throat is parched. I would drink."

"There is a water-carrier." Jerad looked curiously at Doeg.

"No thirst at my lips, but in my heart—great thirst is there!"

Jerad stroked Doeg's beard. "Son of Edom, together we will work for Israel. Come with me."

They came to the barracks near the palace where the Gibborim were housed. There they found Benaiah, who nodded pleasantly. "What seek ye?"

"That Ruth's father should join the Gibborim."

Benaiah nodded. "Doeg has a great fighting record."

"And for doing evil," said the Edomite.

"Fighting has made Israel what she is—it hath destroyed Ammon and Moab and Edom!"

Doeg started and spoke in anger. "Destroyed Edom! Eight kings were in Edom ere there was one in Israel! I am come from those kings!"

"Where are those kings? Where is Edom now? Under the spear of David."

Doeg shrugged a shoulder, but made no reply. He wished to stand well with the Gibborim.

Benaiah took a sword and spear and said: "Now come with me to Joab."

With burning eyes Doeg saw the sword and spear. "I will fight for him who conquered Edom and has conquered me."

Benaiah then took him to Joab, and Joab, ever alert for good soldiers, gladly made him one of the Gibborim, the honoured soldiers of Israel. Joab and Doeg talked together.

Presently Jerad left the barracks and in his inspection moved again towards the market of Jerusalem. There he met Leah. Seeing him, her face turned paler. Love of this one-time foe of her people was deeper in her than all else.

Jerad came close to her and warmly greeted her. Then he looked round the forlorn streets. "Thou hast ever gone among the people. Thy voice and hand are beloved here. None is safe in this stricken city."

Leah inclined her head, but her eyes were questioning: "What is it thou dost wish, Jerad?"

"Ever the unchanging wish, that thou shouldst marry me, Leah."

She shook her head. "Marriage in days of pestilence! That could not be. My heart is only for stricken Israel."

"Though Israel's days be dark, yet one must live. I pray thee, make my home for me."

She smiled bitterly. "Only when thou art ill will I come to thy home."

Jerad shook his head. "I am never ill."

"Then I shall never come," she said with sadness in her eyes.

He nodded in a strange way. "In my soul, Leah, I know that thou wilt come to me."

She looked at him with eyes that saw again the hills when she had first met him, and the pulses of her heart beat again for him—as they had ever done. She recalled his going for Jonathan, and her joy on his return. She knew he had returned to the Philistine camp more than once, but her heart was ever hungry till he came back. She remembered the night in the palace when it might seem their lives were for ever sealed, yet naught had come of it, she knew not why. Her soul was like a dry water-pool in the hills of Judah. Something deeper—was it nationality?—than herself came between them. He had deserted Philistia and was now captain in her uncle's forces, and yet it ended there!

Gently she spoke to him. "If thy soul knows, Jerad, then trust it. When this plague is over, it may be—I cannot tell! Yet see"—she placed her hand on his arm, "we have known each other long, and—and, when this plague is over—Jerad!"

In joy he caught her fingers and pressed them, but he did not speak, and she turned and hurried on her mission of relief.

Jerad kept on his tour of inspection with his fellow Gibborim and he saw many stricken down. He thought much of Leah. As she had said, he had returned to his people, the Philistines, more than once to try and forget her, but it

had not been possible. She was permanently in his life. Now buoyed up with her last words to him, with his own hand he helped stricken folk. All day he worked, but at last he felt a strange sensation in his body. His veins ran cold, his eyes grew dim. He got at last to his home only with the help of a soldier. He lay upon his bed and sent the man to bring Leah.

When the Gibbor found Leah in a bereaved home, she drew her robe close round her and ran hard through the lonely streets towards Jerad's home. It was somehow in her soul that danger was ahead. Her eyes took on a mystic light. She was now, as when a child, in a world not of Palestine, but of God's universe—alone in the vast immensity, a particle flying to the centre. People saw her running and wondered. It was like a storm rushing over the plains of Edsrailon, like a troubled sea of Galilee where there had been peace. Eyes glowing, cheeks pale, heart beating hard, she entered Jerad's home, and saw him lying with sunken cheeks and helpless body. She anxiously leaned over him. "Jerad—Jerad, look at me, beloved!"

Jerad's eyes opened under her tense look. She seemed so far away, he could scarcely see her, but his lips moved.

"Leah—Leah! I was a fighter—but I shall fight no more."

It took him long to say this, and Leah stooped and kissed his ashen cheek. "Jerad, I go with thee where'er thou goest. Beyond the clouds and mists I will follow thee!"

He half raised a hand, but it had no strength, and it was yellow and parched, and his look was that of another world.

Leah went to the door and called a soldier. "Bring a priest quickly," she said; then she turned to Jerad again, who lay with eyes closed—and they would never open again! He was strangely, terribly handsome in his unconsciousness. His high forehead and bronzed hair loose about his head, and pale and shrunken cheek gave him an almost unearthly beauty of a tragic kind. Leah looked at him with devouring eyes.

She was glad she had given him hope in the morning, and she knew that his going was for him robbed of its stark agony. She blessed herself for the inspiration of that moment. She saw his grey lips tremble, and then with one deep sigh he grew still.

Turning now, she saw Nathan enter. "Peace be to this house," he said.

In grief and misery she said: "There is peace!"

Nathan went to Jerad's bed and saw him cold in death. He raised his hand in blessing over the latest victim of the plague, then he turned to Leah. "God give thee strength, my daughter."

Leah passed slowly from the house.

Later was heard a sound like the far-off quavering of many owls. It shrilled, swelled, wavered, dropped—then died away, like the moaning of the wind at sea. It was wild and plaintive like the cries of beasts, in which no words could be distinguished. The prophet Micah says: "For this will I wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked. I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches."

Leah walked swiftly towards the palace, and the people went wailing after her, for they knew that Jerad was gone. A voice shouted from a poor home: "Cursed be your father!" But from another home there came a happier cry: "May God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh"—a blessing and not a curse!

Presently Leah entered the palace and sought the throne-room of the King. There were others with him and he dismissed them, for he saw Leah was in great distress. When all had gone, he turned to Leah. "What is thy grief—is it Jerad?"

Looking him in the eyes with bitter dimness, she said: "Jerad is gone for ever."

David was shaken. "Jerad—Jerad has been smitten!"

Leah lifted her head with a courage which was David's

also. "His people were not my people, yet no man in Israel ever moved me so. I loved Jerad. All I am was his."

An anxious questioning look came to David's eyes. "Look at me."

She raised her head slowly yet firmly.

The King understood. He sat with drooping head, his hands between his knees for a moment, then he said: "Through me thou hast lost thy lover."

"No, I have found him—for ever," said Leah with an uplifted look.

David stooped and kissed her head. "Courage is in thee. May the cloud be lifted from Israel—respite, oh respite, Jehovah!"

Leah turned to go, and David followed her to the door. "I cannot help thee, Leah. Thy faith must be thy stay."

She did not speak. She kissed his hand, then went out towards her home.

A shepherd passed her and, seeing her sorrow, said: "God make thee like Sarah and Rebecca."

He had his club, and in his scrip were flint and iron and food. He had had only goat's-milk since the early morning. His few sheep were dead. No need to cry to them "Taaho," or to make the sibilant sound by which they would come to him. He would no longer put them in the caves or offer them bowls of water to drink as they went to the pen where he kept them from danger. The Almighty had stricken not only people in the towns but also the shepherds and the sheep.

An armed Philistine passed him, wearing a plated corselet, a round buckler, heavy broadsword and a long spear. It was Bolon on his way to the home of Jerad, his brother, who was being carried by the Gibborim to the barracks near the palace. Bolon paused. Wailing Jews near him called Jerad's name. Bolon was startled—Jerad was dead!

Bolon had come from Gaza to beg Jerad to return to his own people, but now it was too late. As a captain of David's

force, within twenty-four hours Jerad would be buried with honour. Alone he had entered this world and alone he had left it. Jerad had died a traitor to his own people!

Lifting a hand towards the dead body being carried by the Gibborim, Bolon said: "We shall meet no more. Fare thee well, Jerad."

As he walked towards the Fish Gate, angry Jews spat at him. He took no heed. Women passed him loaded with jewellry, on their arms heavy bracelets, on their fingers clumsy rings, and with rows of coins on their headdresses. Ankle chains, sashes, amulets and nose jewels, and sometimes a gorgeous coat of coloured cloth with bright braiding round the edges and over the whole a veil of fine white cotton material.

Leaving the city gate, Bolon saw the new moon for the first time. A Jew stretched a hand towards it, brought the hand back to his mouth, kissed it and touched his forehead, saying: "May God be honoured and may you be honoured!" Bolon smiled, for this was a survival of the idolatrous sun and moon worship so common in the East.

Outside the city of Jerusalem he came upon huts with ovens, the favourite meeting-place for the women of the village in cold or wet weather, and at such times they spent hours there. Walking through the country he saw children in their single loose garment shaking cloths and branches of trees, beating drums and shouting in chorus: "O Lord, rain! O Lord, a torrent! Water thy thirsty crops!"

The mortality among children was great. In the winter netsch and dried offal of cattle for fire was scant, and many passed away. He saw ploughing done, chiefly by oxen, and sometimes oxen and asses yoked together, though this was against custom. He passed booths or sheds made of a few leafy boughs on four sticks and forming slight shelter from the sun.

After having walked for hours swiftly, he came to the house of Zelek, a Jew. The door was opened and he entered.

Mattresses and cushions and food and drink were brought, for even to a foe, hospitality in a Jewish home was great. His host knew he was a Philistine. The brother of Jerad ate and drank deeply and they talked together, and Bolon leaving, said: "When thou comest to my people I will do by thee as thou hast done by me."

For forty years the Philistines had held sway over Israel until the second battle of Ebenezer, when Samuel had defeated them. The battle of Gilboa was a last desperate effort to check their further progress, but at last David had won two brilliant victories at Baal-Perazim and in the valley of Rephaim, pursuing them from "Geba until thou come to Gazer." David had even marched on Gath, reduced Ashdod, the Philistine mother-city, returning in triumph to Jerusalem with a bodyguard of Philistines.

All this the two knew, and as they parted the Jew said: "The God of Abraham be with thee!"

The Philistine adjusted his uniform and smiling said: "Baal bless thee, Zelek!"

CHAPTER XLVII

"AMNON IS GONE!"

BECAUSE of a hideous family crime, King David would not see Amnon, son of Ahinoam, his first-born. Absalom, his son by Maacah, hated his eldest brother for the crime, and for two long years waited with deadly patience for chance to slay him.

Absalom was evil, but he had decision and immense skill in subterfuge. His nature rose in fury against Amnon, for Tamar, his sister, in her misery and shame had come straight to Absalom's house and there hid from the world. Time did not lessen, it deepened Absalom's hatred. His spirit was like a spinning wheel of fire against his unworthy brother.

At last Absalom came to the palace, and with dissimulation said to David he wished all the family present at the sheep-shearing at Baal-hazor, Amnon included. Baal-hazor was a fine estate. There were many sheep, there would be feasting and all Israel would know of the family gathering and that there was peace in the royal house.

David hesitated about Amnon, yet two years had gone since the crime against Tamar. Because of his own sin with Bath-sheba, he had not punished Amnon; he had only banished him from his court, and he never saw his face or spoke to him. It all made his heart sick.

David, not guessing the real purpose of Absalom, and as he himself should not see Amnon or speak to him, gave his assent.

"So be it. Amnon and all thy brothers shall go to the sheep-shearing at Baal-hazor. Jehovah's blessing to ye all."

Absalom bowed low, but it was sacrilege to call the blessing of Jehovah on this sheep-shearing! Yet he was having his way, and there was hidden in his eyes an evil smile. Now Amnon might hesitate to come at his own invitation, but would come by command of the King.

"Wilt thou send a message to Amnon?"

The King did not like the request, but reluctantly agreed to send a message to Amnon. Then he turned away from Absalom, darkness in his spirit he knew not why.

All of David's sons, Amnon included, went to Baal-hazor. Absalom, who had not met Amnon since his crime, clasped him to his breast and kissed his shoulder—but it was the kiss of death! He gave word to his servants that when at the feast Amnon should be merry with wine they should fall upon him and slay him. So at the feast, while yet the shearing of the sheep went on to the chanting of the shearers, Absalom raised his cup of wine. "To the glory of Israel!"

All cups were raised, but this was the signal, and at that instant the attendants fell upon Amnon and slew him before Absalom's eyes. Absalom threw down his cup and, standing

over the dead body of Amnon, shouted with fury: "Thou hast paid the price, thou traitor!"

Then Jonadab, son of Shammah, and all the brothers of Absalom hastily mounted their mules and fled to Jerusalem.

Word had already reached King David that all his sons had been slain by Absalom. He rent his garments and in despair threw himself upon the ground, and all his court did the same. Jonadab entered in agitation, and seeing the tragic grief and hearing their words, said: "O King, not all thy sons are slain, but only Amnon."

Freed from the anguish of thinking all his sons were killed, David, grown quieter, rose to his feet. At that moment the sons of David who had been at the shearing entered in great agitation. With haggard faces they said: "We all saw Amnon slain, Absalom had planned it all. He stood in fury by the body and cursed it to the deepest hell."

Presently the sound of hoofs was heard without the palace, and a voice shouted: "Amnon is gone! Amnon is gone!"

It was Absalom's voice. As they all stood dumbfounded, they heard the hoof-beats die away.

Absalom, who knew he could dwell with him in safety, fled to his grandfather, Talmai, the King of Geshur. By day, by night he rode hard alone, getting changes of horses, for which he paid freely. Gloating that he had punished Amnon, he came at last to his grandfather's court.

Meanwhile David, ever hiding the distress at his heart before the people, held his councils, consulted with his brothers, and was kind to his sons; yet all the time his spirit was set against Absalom, whom he had deeply loved, and still loved. Here was the inner weakness of his nature—he loved his unworthy son, and would ever do so. Maacah he saw but seldom, and he never went to her. She had judgment and she understood. She saw the land prosper and she was not unhappy, for she knew David loved Absalom.

At last Joab, who knew that Absalom's long absence would turn public feeling against David, sent to Tekoah for a wise

woman and told her what to say to the King. He bade her have care in statement, and he anxiously watched her enter the royal chamber.

She said to the King she had had two sons and they strove together and one smote the other and slew him. Then the whole family had demanded the slayer to be delivered that they might kill him. What was she to do?

The King, who had listened intently to the woman's tale, stirred in indignation on his throne. "Bring the young man to me. Not one hair of thy son shall fall to the earth."

The woman devoutly spoke. "As an angel so hath my lord the King discerned the good and bad, and the Lord thy God will be with thee."

David, with a quick mind to grasp essentials, felt somehow the unsoundness in her words. They were too glib for truth, and he had in him the soul of truth.

Suddenly suspecting her, he said: "Is not the hand of Joab behind this?"

Amazed at his perception, the woman replied: "None can turn to the right hand or to the left but thou dost know. Thy servant Joab put these words into my mouth."

David then rose, and with a gift of coin, bade the woman be gone. He said to himself: "Joab hath subtlety, yet he is right. Absalom slew Amnon; in my soul I know he did justly." He sank upon a bench in bitterness.

At last he sent for Joab, and when Joab entered in anxiety David looked at him with friendliness. "Thou hast done this thing in thine own way, Joab. Crookedness, yet goodness is in thee. I forgive thee all. See, thou hast prevailed. Go to Absalom—bring him hither."

Joab, in gratitude and relief, fell on the ground and said: "Today I have found grace in thy sight."

David stooped and helped him rise. "Bring Absalom to Jerusalem. Yet he shall not see my face."

Joab now recovering himself and loyal to Israel, knowing

the public mind, protested. "If thou dost pardon him, why should he not speak with thee?"

David's voice was stern. "Nay, but he shall not speak with me."

King David was passing through sordid days. His most loved son had stricken at the stable qualities of his nature. The blow had shaken the foundations of his life.

For two years Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem, but he saw not the King face to face. Restiveness and vexation grew in him. Twice he sent for Joab, but Joab would not come. Then he bade his servants set Joab's field of barley afire. Joab, ever thrifty, now came. He was angry. "Why did thy servants set my field on fire?"

Absalom spoke fiercely. "Wherefore am I come from Geshur? It had been good for me to be there still. Bring me to the King, then let him slay me if he will. I am shamed before the people of Israel. I did my duty—I slew my evil brother. Wilt thou go to the King?"

Joab looked at him intently. "Thou hast darkly gained thine ends, but thou art right—I go to King David."

Absalom watched him go, and on his lips was a sneer. He had lost caste because the people knew he never met his father face to face. This embittered him, for vanity was deep in him, as inherent truth was deep in David. In the end vanity would drive Absalom to revolt and doom, and truth would save David in his darkest days. Absalom was sure the King would forgive him and receive him, and after that he would move in shadowed and hateful ways—for Absalom!

CHAPTER XLVIII

DAVID FLEES FROM ABSALOM

DAVID sat on a bench, his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, thinking of days when he had sat on a stone in the hills tending his father's sheep. Despite the joy of all the people when he was crowned, God's hand was striking hard. Every death in the land reported was like tearing hair from his head, like the falling of a hawk upon a small defenceless sparrow.

There had been no man in all Israel more beloved than he, none who had so proved his greatness by conquering other nations. Sheep and cattle had increased and the trade of the land had grown greater. All had seemed well until Bathsheba came—and now! Jehovah's lightning had smitten him and it was smiting the people everywhere.

A few hours later David went into the streets of Jerusalem with Benaiah only. He was to visit homes smitten by the fever. As he passed there was no cheering as of old. He might have been a stranger, so silent were the people save for the wailing of the dead. Once or twice angry voices shouted at him: "Back to thy hills, shepherd!" Once a voice shouted: "Thou shalt be thrown from the city walls, thou ravager of Israel!"

David shook his head. "Those who blessed yesterday curse today; those who curse today will bless tomorrow. Man's mind is not stable."

Benaiah shook his head. "Yet, O King, thy people are stable to thee!"

At that moment a man rushed from a house David had passed with a long stake in his hand. Swiftly he followed, with murder in his eye. His footsteps did not sound in the street. From a cross street came Doeg. It was at the moment the half-demented man raised his stake to drive it into David

that Doeg threw a spear and brought him down. The stake fell at David's feet as he swung round to see.

In the uniform of the Gibborim, Doeg drew near. David looked at the dead Jew, who had fallen on his face with the spear upright in his back, and he said quietly: "Doeg, thou hast paid for all thou didst against me."

Doeg bowed his head. "I am thy faithful servant ever. God grant thee a thousand years."

David placed his hand on Doeg's shoulder, and looked him steadily in the eye: "Man of men, walk these black paths with me."

So together David, Benaiah and Doeg went steadily through the streets, evil eyes watching them. Now and then they came upon a funeral procession, with the dead body carried on a bier and behind it the wailing people. David's body was erect now, his chin was resolute, his bearing that of a general who endures defeat with implacable courage.

At last one day Benaiah came to the palace into David's presence. "King of Israel, good news for thee. The plague is ended. Not one death in all Jerusalem last night. I told thee every day of death, I tell thee now of life. Jerusalem knows—hear the cheering! Death has passed us by."

Into David's face came a new light. "The smiting Hand now heals. Bring Joab to me."

Joab came. His face was bitter.

"What wouldst thou say, Joab?"

"Again thou art smitten! Absalom rises against thee!"

David was astounded and disbelieving. "My son does not attack his father! Nay, it is not so!"

In angry negation, Joab shook his head. "He has sent spies throughout the tribes saying: 'As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say 'Absalom reigneth.' Messengers say the hearts of Israel are with Absalom."

David's face changed colour now. Grief bowed his head.

"My son Absalom turned against me! My world falls to dust!"

"Thou didst forgive his killing Amnon, yet he would take thy throne and slay thee!"

David straightened his back and his eyes steadied. "I will leave Jerusalem. Make ready to go."

Joab flared in indignation. "That is not thy duty. I conquered Jerusalem for thee. Thou art master here."

"Obey my commands, Joab. I am still King of Israel."

Joab gloomily left, and David went to Bathsheba's chamber. She rose. "Peace and storm are in thy face, David. Is the plague ended?"

David's face was strained. "It is ended, but another ill has come. Absalom has rebelled and would slay me. Joab says he has won Israel from me. I shall flee from this city."

Indignation was in her eyes. "Does King David flee from danger?"

"It is my will to go."

"It should be thy will to stay. Thou and Joab conquered Jerusalem. Here is the centre of thy power and here thy feet should be like nails driven in the ground."

Her words were like thorns in the flesh of David, but the plague had shaken his spirit. That his best loved son should revolt and seek to kill him was like a flaming iron on a sore. Rebellion by other children would have stricken hard, but this was torture like skin torn from the flesh. The anger of the people, the punishment of the Almighty, had broken his native strength.

David bowed his head sombrely. "I am not of the city. I am of the hills and open spaces. In them I shall gain power and will once more."

"Thou wilt not take thy wives and children with thee?"

"Thou shalt go with me."

Bathsheba's long slim fingers intertwined, her breast heaved, her eyes grew blacker. Her lips whitened. "If thou fleest, I will not go with thee."

It was a bold move—the intriguing spirit of the woman, but it failed. The native self-will and set purpose of David rose to the event. "I will go and thou shalt go with me, or . . ." He paused frowning.

Bathsheba bared her bosom. "Or thou wilt slay me! Let it be so. Thou wilt strike at thine own heart, life and everlasting fame."

David drew himself together. "No, I will not slay thee, but my doom shall be thy doom."

She laid her hands upon his shoulders looking him into his eyes. "I obey. For love of thee I would wipe out my sin by standing on a scaffold a hundred cubits high."

David grasped her in his arms and drew her close. "Thou art my last love—none follows thee, Bathsheba."

Her eyes grew large. Dark spirit as she was, light followed her footsteps. While time should last her name as the mother of Solomon should be known.

"Even when Israel is gone thou wilt remain, David. I bid thee, have no fear."

"Fear I have never known, yet I have lost something, Bathsheba—I know not what it is! I go into the hills to find myself again."

CHAPTER XLIX

CURSING DAVID

AS David and his family and servants and staff and his frowning brothers passed through Jerusalem, there was silence, for people saw him fleeing from his own son. They could not understand that one who had broken many nations should flee from one he had so deeply loved. Leaving the walls of Jerusalem, David bowed his body and wept. He covered his head and went barefoot, and all with him did likewise. As they went through the vale of Hinnom and the

Garden of Gethsemane towards Mount Olivet they could see Absalom's army quickly marching to enter the eastern city of Jerusalem.

Bathsheba bitterly said: "David, cease weeping. Comfort and cheer the people! Though Absalom enters Jerusalem, God will not forsake thee."

David watched Absalom's army enter the city, and he said: "He is in my city! My spirit is broken. I flee from my ungrateful son."

"But thou wilt drive Absalom to everlasting exile."

David raised his head. They were now on the top of Mount Olivet. They could see Jerusalem and the haze over Jordan, and the Mountains of Moab in the mauve and soft green and tender gold and translucent violet. He sent his brother Raddai to bring Joab.

Joab, always bold and never hesitating to speak his mind, bowing low before David, said: "Thy tears wash away, they do not give me men. Our soldiers' spirit is low. Thou shouldst cease weeping, walk boldly and stand firm now, or all will be lost. Put on thy sandals, I pray thee!"

David had ever the power to control himself before the people, and his flight from the capital of his kingdom was the sign that his own sin and the rebellion of his son had shaken the fibres of his nature. They had shattered his self-confidence and will to act. He saw the people who were fleeing with him all depressed as was he, he saw the gloomy soldiers, and even his Gibborim were melancholy and scowled as they marched, for they hated this flight from the centre where David had been dominant and powerful.

David saw in the distance the palace from which he had fled and the sun on Mount Zion, and his heart was stirred. Here the crown had been set on all his deeds; it had been the high place where his soul had dreamed of an expanding Empire, and it had been the hostel of his spirit. He stretched out his arms to the city, and broke forth with the words:

"If ever I forget thee, Jerusalem, may my right hand

forget to move! May my tongue cleave to my palate if I cease to think of thee! Jehovah hath lifted me up and cast me down. I go to find my soul again."

Joab heard these words and was glad, for it meant action on the King's part.

Turning now to Joab, David said: "What art thou doing with my army?"

Gloomily Joab spoke: "I am dividing it into three parts."

"That is well. Take one thyself, give one to Abishai, thy brother, and the other to Ittai the Hittite. Amasa is now Absalom's general, but Amasa is less than thou. He lacks in greatness, but he is honest. He has ever loved Absalom."

At this point Joab, who wished to try his power, furtively said: "If I went to Absalom he should reign and thou be an exile!"

Anger flooded David's face.

Bathsheba stepped forward. Her face was pale and her lips firm. "Joab, thou hast freedom of speech before the King which only Lokman ever had. Go thou to Absalom! Thou art not the only sarsaba in Israel! Absalom shall not prevail!"

She drew herself up proudly, her face had courage and she looked him bravely in the eyes. There was a moment's fighting on Joab's part to meet her gaze, but she prevailed. Few could resist her.

David spoke firmly. "Bathsheba hath answered thee. Get thee to thy task, Joab. I go to Mahanaim."

Joab, who had futilely tried his power, promptly said: "A thousand years of life for thee, O King! I do thy will."

With a curious look in his eyes and admiration for Bathsheba in his heart, Joab passed swiftly, with Abishai and Benaiah and his own son, to the organization of his men.

Raddai came. "David, our hearts are with thee! Absalom cannot defeat thee. Thou hast prevailed against mightier men. Thy spear goeth further than all others in this land."

David inclined his head. "My brothers have helped me on; none ever raised his will or spear against me."

"That is left for one born of thee, David."

David did reply to the taunt. "I would speak with Leah. Bring her."

As Leah came, Bathsheba, who knew more of David's inner life than any one, retired. No subtler woman ever lived. Her mind foresaw the golden horn of plenty pouring down from Heaven and power and peace for days to come.

Leah would be to David the faithful friend, close to the spirit of her race and helping to command a more delicate machinery than an army—the souls of the people!

She had been with him in his wandering exiled days and had served him in the days of his vast power. She looked him steadily in the eyes. "Let not this chastisement kill faith in thy star. It shall outshine all others. Thy greatness shall remain."

David straightened his body, and there was a new look in his face of hope and courage.

"Always thou hast helped me, Leah. If I have any greatness, it comes from faith like thine."

"And from Jehovah. Forget not the Ark of the Covenant! It hath ever been Jehovah's symbol to thee. Even when it was far from thee, its power was with thee. It hath helped thee build up Israel. Now it is with thee here, and all shall be well."

Standing near were Zadok and Abiathar and the Levites, and with them was the Ark. David, moved by Leah's words, beckoned to Zadok and Abiathar.

"I will tarry in the hills until Jehovah speaks. Go ye with the Ark to Jerusalem—its home—and there await the will of God."

Zadok turned. "By God's will thou hast suffered. Darkness is about thee, but light is on the hill-tops."

So Zadok and Abiathar left with the Levites and the Ark and returned to Jerusalem.

David, with his brothers and Bathsheba on one side of him, and his other wives and children, knelt and worshipped God. Jerusalem, as they watched the Ark enter the city of Zion, looked beautiful in the sun. There was born in the troops of David a hope of better days. Something stirred in the fibres of their being like the sap of the trees.

Hushai, the aged Archite from Luz and Archin, with coat rent and earth upon his head, entered the camp and came to David. "Why dost thou flee, King of Israel?"

David greeted him warmly. "Hushai, thou art true to me, I know. Come not with me. Go to Jerusalem and say unto Absalom: 'I will be thy servant, O King. As I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now be thy servant.' Then mayest thou defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. He is an able man. I know not why he has gone to Absalom. With great experience he played a strong part among my counsellors."

The old man raised his head firmly. "There is naught I would not do for thee."

David then instructed Hushai as to his actions. He must appear the friend of Absalom, watch Ahithophel and use careful judgment in offering advice. He knew the man's great honesty and ability.

Presently Hushai adjusted his robes again and calmed himself. He left on his mule and went towards the holy city.

Now David and his people came to Bahurim, and there came out a man of the family of Saul, whose name was Shimei, and he cursed David and threw stones at him. "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial. Behold thou art taken in thy mischief because thou art a bloody man."

Then said Abishai, the brother of Joab and for whom David cared much: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the King? Let me take off his head."

David shook his head. "My son seeketh my life; how much more may this Benjamite do it! Let him curse!"

At last David and his troops and people came near to Bethel. They paused there and camped for the night. As David looked at the place he recalled that its name meant House of God, that Abraham had built an altar near it. Jacob had also stayed at Bethel, and through him it had been made famous. Here Jacob had a vision of a ladder reaching from Heaven with angels descending and ascending, and there had been written of it: "This is none other than the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven." Here also he had built an altar on his return from Haran and called the place El-beth-el and received the name of Israel.

David dwelt on these things and looked upon his people and his army, and his spirit slowly changed. In vivid imagination the whole picture of that ancient day came to him, and in the starry night he saw the golden ladder, though his face was in his hands, and lifted towards the sky. He saw the angels coming down and light around them, and at last he said as Jacob said to the Archangel: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Then there was a long silence, but at last came a Voice.

"Abraham and Jacob made this place My House. Thou shalt enlarge Israel. The hand that smites thee shall restore thee!"

David lifted his head and his soul was in his face. New hope entered into him. His pulses beat hard. He said humbly: "Thou King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, my life and soul are Thine. I will praise and magnify Thy holy name for ever."

Dazed, yet inspired, he looked over the sleeping camp. This strange experience had swept through his body and spirit like a flame of fire. It was as though he had seen the Gates of Heaven. His eyes gazed valiantly towards the hills where he had been cursed by Shimei. Jehovah had spoken to him and his spirit was alive with hope.

Now he rose, and coming forward, he sat down near his tent and watched the soft radiant sky with its new crescent moon.

Bathsheba came softly and touched him gently on the shoulder. She saw the smile upon his face. "Is all well, David?"

"All is well. But a little time ago I saw Jacob's ladder and the angels going from Heaven to Earth. I heard Jehovah say that the hand that smote me should restore me. My soul is lifted up."

In ecstasy Bathsheba lifted her arms towards Heaven without a word. Then she placed them around David's neck and there was peace.

All night the young moon and stars shone, and the army and all the people slept well. Bethel was not beautiful, but all that had happened there made it lovely to their eyes when they waked, for the spirit of Jehovah had come to it. In its rugged, uncouth surroundings it had the feeling of the Garden of Eden where Jehovah walked.

The army now saw the face of David smiling on them, and his brothers standing near him smiled also, for David had told them his vision. It gave them all good hope, and they turned their faces northward firmly. They could not see Jerusalem, but they could see Mount Tabor, and a new thought stirred in all their souls. It was the spirit of Israel which led them out of Egypt into this beloved land.

Eliab murmured: "Israel was first named here."

With a sneer Nethaneel said to Eliab: "Yes, David goes to Jacob's school."

CHAPTER L

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM

ABSALOM could see afar the rear of David's scattered troops. He called Ahithophel, who had been much with King David and his brothers and family and had once been his trusted counsellor and was well-known throughout Israel. He was well-balanced, sedate, and had a distinguished presence. Absalom said to him: "Give counsel what we shall do, Ahithophel."

Ahithophel, who had left David because of Bathsheba, thought for a moment, then looked Absalom in the eyes. "First go unto thy father's concubines, and all Israel shall know thou art abhorred of thy father for this thing. It will lessen David's influence in Israel. It will disgrace him; and thou art ever popular and famed for thy presence."

It pleased Absalom that he should set his father against him. With arrogant pride, he stamped his foot and shook back his head of auburn hair, of which he was inordinately vain.

Then Ahithophel further urged: "Let me now choose twelve thousand men, and I will pursue after David this night. I will smite him only and will bring back all his people unto thee. So all the land shall be at peace."

Absalom stroked the beard of Ahithophel. "Thou speakest wisely, counsellor. Righteousness is in thy steps. Go in peace," and he kissed him on both cheeks.

Ahithophel bowed low before Absalom. "O King, live for ever!" and left the chamber in gladness, for Absalom had taken his advice.

Absalom, who had King David's brains and acumen and far-seeing, looked round on his assembled courtiers, then, with a fresh thought, he spoke. "Ahithophel's counsel was good, yet I would look elsewhere. Call Hushai the Archite, who

has come to Jerusalem and has not gone with David. He is a wise man and just. Let us hear him. He is in this house."

Hushai slowly entered, and his dignified aged appearance affected them all. He stood silent, though he bowed low before the son of David.

Absalom straightway told Hushai what Ahithophel had said. "Shall we do after his saying, Hushai? If not, speak."

Hushai firmly rejected the advice of Ahithophel. "O King, live a thousand years, I counsel that Israel be gathered as the sand is by the sea for multitude; I counsel that thou thyself go to battle, and of David and all with him there shall not be left so much as one."

Absalom's eyes took fire and he said to his courtiers: "Hushai's counsel is better than that of Ahithophel. I will destroy all, and I myself will lead my army!" Here his vanity spoke.

His courtiers crowded round praising Absalom, and as sycophants they foresaw place and power with him. They were all selfish. The best of them was Amasa, whom Absalom had made commander of his hosts and who had ever cared for him. Amasa was a brave man and a good general, but far below Joab in military skill. He was not enthusiastic now. Somehow he suspected Hushai, yet he dared not say it, for he had no proof. But he did not applaud. He sagely held his peace. Absalom took his arm.

"Amasa, we shall win," he said. Amasa nodded assent, yet he was doubtful, he knew not why—Joab, his cousin, was a great general!

Then Hushai left Absalom's presence and went unto Zadok the prophet at his home and said: "Send quickly to David and say, 'Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over Jordan, lest thou be swallowed up and all with thee!'"

They sent messengers, and after David had been told, he and all the people with him swiftly passed over the Jordan into the land of the Ammonites.

From the court of Absalom, Jabin, an officer, came to Ahithophel, and he spoke with some anxiety, for he liked the counsellor. "The counsel of Hushai was accepted instead of thine."

Ahithophel was startled. He looked Jabin closely in the eyes as though to read his mind, then he spoke sombrely. "What was Hushai's counsel?"

Jabin replied that not only David but that all with him should be slain, and that Absalom should command his own army.

Ahithophel fell into greater gloom. "If Absalom slays his father and all with him then shall Israel be sorely hurt. Get thee gone!"

Ahithophel looked indignantly at the house where were Absalom and his courtiers, then he saddled his mule and went to his home. There in great dejection, and avoiding his family who were mostly in the hills hunting, Ahithophel wandered, growing less and less enamoured of life. He had lately lost his wife and a son, and loneliness was over the place. He rode on his mule from one point to another, sending away servants and slaves who would have followed him. He wished only to be alone. He saw the Mountains of Moab in their russet lights, and the haze over the valley of the Jordan. In imagination he could hear the willows on its banks sough in the breeze, and he could see the reeds shake and the cypresses quiver. The cypresses, emblems of life ended—cypresses! With a new thought in his mind he returned to his house.

There he put all in order, for to him now life was naught—he had no king, neither David nor Absalom. He was a man of integrity and pride. With his face turned towards the east, he took a robe made of the fibres of the acacia trees by the river Jordan. He looked at it with eyes gone demented with shame, and ran it between his fingers. Then he saw the cypresses in his half-maddened mind. He looked round his great estate, but it now meant naught to him. Darkness was in his soul. He found a lonely room in the house with hooks

against the wall high up. He put the rope round his neck and threw it over a hook. Outside he could hear the braying of a donkey and the drone of the locusts. He closed his eyes.

"Israel! Israel!" he said brokenly—and flung himself upon the rope, and so he died!

Outside, the sheep and goats and cattle fed, and the shepherds fluted, and the birds sang as though there were no trouble in this troubled world. Never had the sun shone so bright, his people seemed happier. They did not know that their master was gone from the pains of time. Men passed on donkeys and chatted gaily, for they were far from Jerusalem, but none knew of the tragedy of this opulent home. A bird sang on the house-top, but within the house a bird was mute—the soul of Ahithophel—who had gone in shame from life.

After a time Ahithophel's astounded family found his body and cut him down, but there was no life in him. They burst into wailing. With great ceremony and lamentation, his family carried him to the sepulchre of his father and there buried him. So passed a just and a true man who had paid the price of his integrity. His life was lost to Israel.

David at last arrived at Mahanaim, and the people under Barzillai and others brought earthen vessels and wheat and barley and flour and parched pulse, and honey and butter and sheep and cheese. They said: "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness. Eat!"

David, having finished eating, and now cheered by the kind reception given him, called Lokman.

Lokman had left Jerusalem in David's train. He had eaten nothing since leaving and his spirit was in revolt. Lokman came forward with his wand.

David studied him. "Fool and jester, what dost thou say to me?"

"What thou dost say to me."

David's face darkened. "Fool and jester, am I an Ethiop?"

"Thou wert a fool to flee thy palace. All that happens since, is jest."

David's body shook with anger. "None ever spoke as thou hast done. Thy head should be in the dust."

Lokman put a long-fingered hand upon his head. "Ha, thou art still here, mine head? Thou shalt be here when the fool and jester are no more."

A grim smile came to David's lips. "How does this jest end?"

Lokman moved his head from side to side, and holding up his wand, spoke. "Thou little terebinth tree, thou art rooted in the soil of Israel. The winds may blow thee, the storms may strike thee, but thou shalt not be moved. Thy roots shall last until the Messiah comes. Hail, terebinth tree!"

David had listened closely and his eyes grew bright. "Joab's armies give me force, but thou dost give me hope. Mine own son has seized my throne."

"The rebel clouds shall sweep away." Lokman pointed to the sky. "Yonder—thy star of Bethlehem shines!"

"Lokman, my hand to thee!"

Lokman kissed David's hand, then at David's gesture left him.

David looked on the camp, now roused from lethargy. It was, like himself, seeing sunrise on the farthest hills. Life was stirring among his troops.

David watched the gossiping of the hopeful people.

Shammah, David's brother, came hastily to him. "Ahithophel is dead. He gat him home in sorrow from Absalom and hanged himself."

David shook his head mournfully. "He has long avoided my court. He was as true a man as Israel ever knew. Peace to his ashes!"

Two days later David reviewed his army under Joab, Abishai and Ittai and Benaiah. With desire to stand well with his troops and ever anxious for Israel's sake, he spoke to them. "I will go forth with you."

But they answered: "Thou shalt not go forth. Thou art worth fifty thousand of us."

David, seeing what they meant, lowered his head in bitter sorrow. "It were better not to fight my son. What seemeth best to you I will do."

His army passed forth with courage. In saying good-bye to Joab, David leaned forward. "For my sake deal gently with the young man, even with Absalom."

Joab did not mean to deal gently with Absalom though he inclined his head.

But Bathsheba spoke to Joab. "Do thy duty, Joab," and Joab nodded. He would slay Absalom with his own hand.

Later, with most of his army gone, David spoke cheerfully to Bathsheba. "The battle will be in the wood of Ephraim. See how bravely my men march. By God's help we will win!"

His wives gathered in good feeling now, all save the mother of Absalom, who stood apart and wept.

David saw her weeping and said: "Peace, peace, Maacah! Absalom shall be safe." But Maacah made no reply. She wept the more.

In the thickest of the fight was Absalom. Like any common soldier, he fought with courage. He saw men hewn down round him. The fight grew more intense in the fields of Ephraim.

Joab had been searching for Absalom to slay him, but had not found him. The battle was over a large territory, and men of both sides fought savagely. At last there came a time when Absalom's men scattered widely before Joab's conquering hosts, who fought fiercely and spared not. All over the vast field the fighting went on, and ever against Absalom's troops, and at last Absalom fled, deserted by all. His men rushed to save themselves.

In agony and shame and loneliness, he was riding wildly in a wood and his mule galloped under the thick bows of a

great oak. His head of auburn hair caught in its branches. The mule fled from beneath him. Absalom then remembered Lokman's words: "Beware the tree, thou son of David!" His heart sank within him. He tried in vain to free himself, but his sword was gone and he could not cut himself loose.

One of David's men saw him hanging and ran to Joab. "Behold, Absalom hangs in an oak."

"Why didst thou not smite and kill him? I would have given thee ten shekels of silver and a girdle."

"Not for a thousand shekels would I set my hand against the King's son."

Joab then took three darts and ran forward into the wood, and there hung Absalom from a tree, vainly tearing at his hair with one hand, for the other was wounded.

Absalom's eyes saw murder in Joab's face. They grew large with terror. "What wouldst thou, Joab, mine uncle?"

"Traitor, thou wouldst slay King David! By the ashes of my father, I will slay thee."

He sternly thrust three darts through the heart of Absalom, and Absalom's eyes in agony closed, his body twisted and at last stood still.

Joab watched him briefly strain and struggle and pass from life, and he was content. A dire foe of David was gone for ever.

Then ten of Joab's young men took Absalom from the tree and cast him into a great pit in the wood, with no ceremony, and spat upon his body and laid a heap of stones upon him.

Over his obscure grave Joab raised a clenched hand. "Thou wert of my family, Absalom, but thou hadst an evil heart. Thou wouldst have slain him who gave thee life. Thou and I were of the same blood, but in thy bones was evil. For our family's sake I slew thee. Thou wilt rebel no more."

Then Joab said to Cushi the Ethiop: "Go, tell King David what thou hast seen," and Cushi bowed himself and ran.

Across the wild plains Cushi ran and came at last to David

in the gate where was Bathsheba and his other wives, and said:

"Tidings, my lord the King, for the Lord hath avenged thee this day."

David, half rising and frightened by the look in Cushi's face, in great anxiety said: "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

"The enemies of my lord the King and all that rise to do thee hurt, be as that young man is!"

David got unsteadily to his feet, trembling in all his body. "Oh, thou beast of hell, to tell me this! Out of my sight!"

He bowed his head and wept, and in vain Bathsheba tried to comfort him. After a little time he left them all and went to the chamber over the gate, and throwing himself in agonized despair upon the ground, he cried:

"Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee! Oh Absalom, my son! My son!"

CHAPTER LI

DAVID LAYS A HAND UPON HIS WILL

AS David mourned for the death of his rebel son, Bathsheba came to him. He did not hear her enter. A moment motionless she stood looking at him and joying that Absalom was slain. That would move from the path of her own son Solomon an able and dangerous rival. David had other sons, such as Adonijah, Chileab, Daniel, Nogah, Nepheg and others, but the ablest of these was Adonijah. In her heart was dark content, yet at her lips was reproach for David.

"Absalom would have given thee to death. Israel will turn from thee if thou dost mourn this recreant son."

David's face was haggard. "I said that Absalom should not be touched, but Joab slew him."

"Joab has made possible thy return to Jerusalem. Would thou have forgiven Absalom who tried to turn Israel from thee? The Jewish people love thee, but they loved Absalom too; yet he died deserted by all. Thine ancient strength and sense of justice are gone from thee. Remember Bethel and Mahanaim; hear again the voice of God, lift up thy head and heart."

David's face clouded, and he spoke sadly. "I loved Absalom before I loved thee. He is gone for ever."

She drew herself together firmly. "Thou hast a conqueror's greatness, but also the weakness of a babe. Strong men have been about thee—Joab, Abishai, Benaiah, Jonadab, Jehoshaphat, Seraiah, Abinadab, and many more. By them the palace gates have again opened for thee. Show thyself to the people."

She turned and left the chamber and the King ruefully watched her go. Then he put a hand upon his will and prayed to God for light.

Presently Joab, elated and sturdy, entered from the field of battle. David looked at him in rigid silence.

"Have I not served thee well, King David?"

David spoke sternly. "By Jehovah's help thou hast restored my throne, but Absalom is no more!"

"He would have slain thee. He cannot now harm our land. Thy son is in his grave. With this hand I slew him. I thought not of him nor of thee, but of Israel which thou hast made so great. My hand did not flinch, my heart bled, but it was the blood of a patriot, and once more Jerusalem is thine."

David would have dismissed him then, but he knew well Joab's value as sarsaba, and as King he loved the land. For the sake of the people he would conquer his own hatred. He listened intently to Joab; he could not deny his logic.

"Disobeying me, thou didst slay my son!"

Joab drew himself up. "I did thy duty for thee. Go forth, O King, and speak unto thy people. If thou dost not,

they will not tarry with thee this night—an evil worse than all befalling thee till now."

David looked at Joab with malice in his heart, yet he fought his feelings and conquered them. For Israel's sake kindness now came to his tongue. "Yea, I will sit in the city gate that they may see me." He raised his head. "Forsake me not, O God, when my strength faileth. Let me never be put to confusion."

Joab smiled in his heart, and he bowed low. Then David left the palace with Joab and sat in the gate. His bearing was ever interesting; it had influence, charm and power. The people shouted. "The King has saved us and Absalom is dead in battle!"

Joab left David in the gate with the people swarming towards him. He returned to the army, cursing the King's momentary weakness and kissing the hand that had thrust the darts into the body of Absalom.

David smiled at the clamorous people, yet grieved for Absalom and still hated Joab. As he smiled at the people he came to a new determination. He sent for Benaiah. He would stand independent of Joab and dismiss him. He had outwardly forgiven him for the people's sake, but that should now end; he would fight through and he would win with another sarsaba. Who should that sarsaba be? Not Ittai, the Philistine, not Abishai, Joab's brother, not Jehoshaphat who had lately shown military skill, not one of his own brothers or sons, for they were brave but had no skill as generals. But Amasa, his nephew, who had gone to Absalom because he loved him. David himself had loved Absalom. Amasa was a man of merit and a capable general, as he had proved. But he had had an impossible task against Joab. He was one of his own family, brave and popular with the people, and the choice of him would be well applauded. Yes, it should be Amasa who would either be for ever ruined by this late defeat or be restored—even with the Jews the guiding finger swings the pendulum right.

Benaiah entered upon David, who welcomed him warmly. "Majesty, what is thy command?"

"Thou wilt go to Amasa, Absalom's sarsaba; say to him: 'Art thou not of King David's bone and flesh? He bids thee come to him!'"

Benaiah bowed low. "I will bring Amasa to thee."

Presently Amasa came with Benaiah. He had dignity and a composed, fearless face.

The King gazed gently at him and waved a hand. "Amasa, loving Absalom, thou didst fight against me and for him. But Jehovah was on our side. My armies defeated thine, but Joab's hand slew Absalom. His army is gone, but thou art here, my mistaken foe. Now I forgive thee. Wilt thou take Joab's place, Amasa?"

Startled and glad, Amasa bowed reverently. "Such high honour for me! Thy sarsaba, mine uncle? Greatness and goodness are in thee! I fought for thy son Absalom, but he is gone. This hand of mine shall fight for thee until life's end."

David solemnly kissed him on both cheeks. "Go among the people in Judah and Israel and assemble them for me, Amasa. Thou shalt wear Joab's robe and girdle. Benaiah will give them to thee."

David returned to the palace, and with Bathsheba and his other wives and his small staff, followed by applauding people, he came by the valley of Ephraim to the Mount of Olives. It was in the morning light. The valley of Kidron and the vale of Hinnom and the Pool of Siloam were shining in the sun. He stuck his spear into the ground and gazed at Jerusalem lovingly.

Standing at his side, Bathsheba said: "Thy throne is thine again."

David turned upon her. "Thy courage and faith are ever with me. Behold I love thee!"

At last, amid shouting and dancing, they passed up the steep hill of Zion, and at David's palace went to their old

rooms. David's concubines, to whom Absalom had gone on Ahithophel's advice, were at once confined in a house near the palace and David saw them face to face no more.

At the palace Maacah, wan and broken, came into David's presence. He gazed at her sadly, yet kindness was in his heart. His voice was husky. "Our son Absalom is gone—I loved him."

Maacah bowed her head. "Joab killed him—thou dost keep Joab still!"

"Joab shall lead my armies no more. Amasa, Absalom's general, is in his place."

Maacah bowed her head, and David rose, came forward and kissed her, "Daughter of a King, thou showest royal courage."

She made no reply, but she left the room erect.

All seemed at peace in Israel, but David did not, however, reckon with Sheba, a man of Belial, son of Bichri, a Benjamite, who had blown a trumpet outside Jerusalem and said: "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tent, O Israel!"

Many Israelites followed Sheba into the north, where he would gather force, but all the men of Judah clave unto their King.

Ever grateful to those who served him, David sent for Hushai, who had been the first and surest means of his defeat of Absalom. He had stayed with Absalom until the battle in the wood of Ephraim. Then he had joined the troops of Joab.

When Hushai entered David's chamber, the King kissed him on both cheeks. "By God's will and thy good service I am once more in Jerusalem."

Hushai's grey head raised itself and in his eyes was gladness. "By God's grace I defeated Ahithophel!"

"For all thou hast done, what can I give thee, Hushai?"

Hushai stretched a protesting hand. "Not for thee alone

did I go to Absalom, but for what is greater than thou—Israel! Thou canst give me naught. I have many sheep, I have land near Bethel and at Luz and Archin. I want naught save thy faith in me."

David looked lovingly at him. "Thou shalt have this spear, the symbol of my power. I have had it long. Keep it, Hushai, and may all goodness be with thee."

Hushai, moved much by this high honour, with trembling fingers took the spear and reverently kissed it. "I shall keep it ever in my home."

David's harp was near, and he reached out eager fingers for it. Great events moved him to pour out his spirit before the Lord. To him it was the channel of the river of his soul. He looked at Hushai and he said: "Wilt thou listen to my harp?"

Hushai bowed low in gratitude.

David summoned his wives and family and courtiers, and when they had come he took his harp, and after a moment he chanted:

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer; the God of my rock, in Him will I trust. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour.

"The sorrows of hell compassed me about, the snares of death prevented me, but God did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears.

"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He brought me forth also into a large place. He delivered me because He delighted in me.

"Thou art my lamp, O Lord, and the Lord will lighten my darkness. God is my strength and power, and He maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hind's feet and setteth me upon my high places.

"Therefore will I give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, and I will sing praises unto Thy name. He is the tower of salvation for His king and sheweth mercy unto His anointed —unto David and his seed for evermore."

Hushai had never seen David so exalted as now, with this chant falling from his lips. When the chant ended, Hushai said: "This will cheer me till life is done."

Hushai left the palace and David watched him go. Then his family and his courtiers withdrew at his gesture, and he stood in his chamber alone. Long he sat in silence, but at last he raised his eyes and saw Mount Olivet. He shook his head in sorrow, then lifted it bravely. "Life was sweet behind me—may it be sweet before me! I walk in slippery places, but the rocks of Judah are in my feet!"

Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah and Israel, but he tarried long and David sent Abishai to pursue Sheba northward.

Meanwhile, Joab, who had been pursuing and killing the defeated troops of Absalom throughout Judah and Galilee, returned to Jerusalem. There he found that Amasa had been made David's sarsaba. He did not go near the palace. In great anger and with a handful of men, he left Jerusalem and went up towards Abel-beth-Maachah, where Sheba had gone. Fury drove Joab on, and at last, at the great stone of Gibeon, he came upon Amasa. Amasa had hurried north to join Abishai, Joab's brother, in the capture of Sheba.

Amasa's men said to him: "Hither come strangers, and one is important—he who leads."

Amasa saw this leading man was Joab, and he waited for him. He was wearing Joab's garment of authority and his girdle, which David had given him. Joab arrived smiling and Amasa advanced to him, mingled feelings in his face. They both bowed and then embraced, and Joab drew Amasa aside and spoke softly:

"Art thou in health, my brother?"

Amasa smiled and Joab took him by the beard and kissed him, and he then savagely smote him with a sword under the fifth rib. So, Amasa, moaning, fell upon the ground, and

Joab said: "Thou dost wear my robe in death, thief of my office. Home to Satan with thee!"

Amasa, smitten to death, raised his head as though to speak, but could not, and without a word he died. Joab's men removed his body from the roadway and buried it, and the troops went on to Abel-beth-Maachah.

Abishai gladly welcomed Joab, for they were ever united. Abishai was not nearly so great a general, yet a good one, and he greatly loved Joab.

They cast up a bank against Abel, and the army with Joab and Abishai battered the wall to throw it down. Then a wise woman of the city cried: "Hear, hear, I pray thee, Joab; come near that I may speak to thee."

Joab came. She said to him. "Behold, Sheba's head shall be thrown to thee over the wall."

The people of Abel now fought Sheba's men. They seized Sheba and cut off his head and threw it over the wall to Joab with the cry: "Take this traitor's head and leave us at peace." Joab saluted the city, for his work was done. He had come only against Sheba. With the rejoicing of the troops, Joab and Abishai returned to Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem did not cheer Joab—they had been told he had killed Amasa, his own cousin, and Amasa was beloved of all the people. Word had come to David of Amasa's death. His spirit revolted against Joab. David's heart was vicious against Joab in this time of blood and terror.

Joab passed through Jerusalem with Benaiah and the Gibborim, and came to David's palace. There, after a time, he entered David's presence. None could have told from David's face how he loathed Joab.

"Welcome to Jerusalem, Joab. What news dost thou bring?"

Joab's eyes showed naught but valour. "Sheba is gone to his account. I bring thee peace in Israel."

David dissembled. "Peace—thou dost bring peace, Joab?"

Joab's voice was roughly satirical. "I could have brought thee the head of Amasa—I bring peace instead."

"Thou destroyest thine own flesh and blood, Joab. Amasa was thy cousin."

"And Absalom was thy son, O King!"

David's face paled. "Death for those disobeying the King's commands—death should be thine, Joab! In sorrow and despair I put Amasa in thy place for hatred of thy crime against my son. Thy hands are red with blood."

"Red with the blood of thy foes! Under me, when thou didst flee this city, our armies brought thee back again. Under thee Israel has grown great, and she shall grow greater still. I have no shame. I have done my duty to my King and Israel."

David looked him in the eyes. "Thou art my sarsaba, Joab, but thou hast no greatness of soul. Leave me in peace. Go out to my armies."

Joab bowed low. "I go to make thee greater, King of Israel!" and Joab passed exultant from his presence.

When he had gone, Bathsheba entered. She came softly to the King and, behind him, said: "David!" and David turned and clasped her in his arms.

"God be good to thee and me," he said.

CHAPTER LII

ALL THE WAY WITH ME

HIS foes conquered and greater prosperity for Israel sure, David ordered the sacrifice of a peace offering for triumphs against the foes of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant was made of wood, covered with gold within and without so that the wood was not seen. It had also a cover of gold and hinges. It was not drawn in a cart by the beasts of burden, but borne on the shoulders of the priests. Upon its cover

were the Cherubim. In this Ark were the two tables of the Ten Commandments.

As Judah and Israel were again united, vast numbers came to Jerusalem for the sacrifice. It was held in an open court not far from David's palace, with brazen pillars, very high, and on every one of the pillars was a ring. Cords ran through the rings and were tied to brass nails. A curtain of fine linen went round all the pillars, and hung down in a flowing loose manner and enclosed the whole; and this was the structure of three of the sides of this enclosure, but the fourth side was fifty cubits in extent and twenty cubits were for the opening of the gates. These were made of polished silver, except the bases, which were of brass. Within these gates were the brazen laver for purification. The space within these pillars was the Most Holy Place, and the rest was the Tabernacle.

To such a temple the Levites brought the Ark of the Covenant, and it was reverently set down.

On all sides were the people in holiday clothes. The men with their coloured robes, brown and blue and striped, with girdles and full turbans, made striking contrast to the ornamented women. Now and then a mirror flashed in the sun, and the women's bonnets being hung with bits of silver and coins and bright with ribbons, it all gave beauty to the scene.

David's wives and brothers had preceded him. Looking at the great assemblage, Eliab said: "Time is the friend of David."

Nethaneel darkly added: "David is the friend of Time."

Then Ozem, always cheerful, spoke. "His flag flies high between the two."

David's wives were present, and before them all was Bathsheba, who led by the hand her son Solomon, a lad of modest bearing and handsomeness, who looked with awe upon the crowd. David's other sons were there, but Solomon had the people's applauding eyes. Bathsheba, ever popular and tactful, looked on them all with power of the eye and face only surpassed in all Israel by David.

She turned to Solomon, who was slim and young and as handsome as ever Absalom had been, and with a different heart. "Thou art of these people, and they who have been slaves now rejoice in freedom. For forty years they wandered in the desert."

Solomon's blue eyes lighted. "Yes, I know; and when Joshua came to this side of the Jordan, Jericho had to be taken. Rahab, who dwelt on the city wall with her family, saved the messengers of Joshua from her king. She hid them from the searchers, saving them from death."

The prophet Nathan, who heard what he had said, looked with pride on him, for Solomon read much and wisdom was growing in him. Nathan said: "Rahab was a wanton, and yet those messengers gave her a crimson thread telling her that if it hung at her door it would save her and her family. And so it did."

Bathsheba smiled. "Rahab married Salmon, a prince of Judah, and she is honoured today in Israel."

Nathan looked searchingly at her. "In Jehovah's eyes it is not what we do, it is what we are that counts. What she became all Israel knows. Judith the mother of David is descended from her."

Solomon put a hand on that of Nathan. "Then I have Rahab's blood in my veins, though she lived so long ago."

"May her heart be thine, thou son of Israel."

Now the palace doors were opened by attendants, and David and his generals came forth. The Gibborim marched towards the place of sacrifice, their spears glinting in the sun, their heads aloft with pride. They were led by Abishai, Joab's brother, and behind and near to David was his bodyguard led by Benaiah, all picked men of the Gibborim; then came Joab carrying David's harp, then a space between, and David alone, simply dressed, but bearing himself with quiet dignity—his spear of authority in his hand. At sight of him the people were first stilled to admiration, and a hush passed

through the vast crowd. Then a voice rang out over the heads of the people.

"Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad!" This came from one of the students of Ramah, and it thrilled all the people. They burst into cheering and David came to the place of sacrifice, his eyes shining, his face serene. Slowly he came forward, Zadok and Abiathar and many Levites near him. He raised his hand and spoke:

"How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings." Then he looked round upon them all and said: "People of Israel, ye were children of the desert, but are now of the land that floweth with milk and honey. Time is our friend and the wine of life is ours. The cup of our fertility fills, it runneth over. Flocks and herds increase and riches are here. Treasure comes from conquered peoples. Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Beloved, join with me in a chant of personal sin and national repentance." Once again he raised his eyes. "Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battles; Thou dost throw down mine enemies under me. Thou, O God, art praised in Zion, and unto Thee shall the vow be performed in Jerusalem."

Joab handed the harp to David, and his fingers wandered lovingly over the strings. Then he chanted: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. Jehovah hath made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things and sure."

The people then chanted. "The King hath rejoiced in Thy strength, O God. Truly, Thou art loving unto Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But the sons of Belial shall be as thorns thrust away. Truly our souls wait upon God: from Him cometh our salvation."

This they sang to their own lutes and harps, and their voices were like running water.

Then David again played and sang. "Thou art my tower

—I shall not be greatly moved. In the days of darkness Thy light leadeth me. In the days of danger Thy hand upheld me. In the days of conquest Thy spirit giveth me peace. Thy Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom!"

From every gate of the city—the Corner Gate, the Valley Gate, the Fish Gate, the Fountain Gate, and the Sheep Gate, Israelites had come, and now under David's inspiring guidance they chanted with him: "Here shall be our rest. Here shall we dwell; here is our delight. It is good to give thanks unto the Lord; upon an instrument of ten strings and upon the lute; upon a loud instrument and upon the harp. Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. Peace be upon us and upon all Israel!" Turning from them all, David saw Solomon with Bathsheba, and he said: "Solomon, my beloved, is as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi."

He now turned to Joab. "In the sacrifice of peace I give thee greeting, Joab."

Joab bowed low. "God give thee a thousand years, O King! None shall succeed against thee."

Nathan the prophet stepped forward. "The hand of Jehovah upholds, the love of Jehovah sustains."

Bathsheba came close to David. "Thou hast far to go," she said. "Thy sun shall never set."

"I have far to go; thou goest all the way with me."

David then returned to the palace with his wives, and as he walked he held Solomon by the hand.

When the ritual was over, dancing and singing began. Here could be seen one taking an oath with hand uplifted solemnly, others with hands spread out in goodwill; others smoothing beards and kissing the shoulder; others offering bread and salt—a pledge of peace. Here and there people sat at meat, and a kid stuffed with peas and roasted whole over the ashes of the fire was eaten standing. Among the dancers were those with blood feuds, and under the influence

of the sacrifice of peace the feuds were sunk and they stroked each other's beards. Women wore nose-rings of gold and silver, bangles were worn upon the ankles and bracelets on the arms. Salutations could be heard: "The safety of your children!" "May God leave you your children!" Love of male children was devout in Palestine. Throughout the city, house doors were open and anyone could walk into the courtyards, and food was distributed to the poor.

In the darkest home a lamp was burning.

CHAPTER LIII

DAVID'S DARK HOUR—ALONE

ARPAD, the King and general commanding the Philistine armies, sent for Bolon, the brother of Jerad. He looked Bolon up and down soberly.

"Thy brother Jerad was a traitorous spy—he died a Jew. It is the ancient law that one of a family shall share the fortunes of the rest. His debt thou must pay. Jerad should have been beheaded. Wilt thou be a spy on Israel?"

Bolon's eyes looked firmly into the king's eyes. "I saw Jerad's body carried to the barracks of the Gibborim in Jerusalem. I will restore his name."

In Bolon's face was energy, will and power. He was not handsome, but inherent bigness was in him.

Arpad smiled. "Well said! King Saul and the Jews were vassals to our people. David is vassal no longer, but thou wilt bring us knowledge of his army, its strength and its position. We shall make him and his house vassals once again."

"I know the wooded heights from here to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and I will bring the key to unlock the doors of the inner courts of David's house. My brother was a traitor! I will redeem his name."

His voice thrilled the king. He was tempted to drop a hand in approval on Bolon's shoulder, but he did not. The man must prove himself.

"Go to the pagan land in the disguise of a Jew, and bring that magic key."

Bowing low, Bolon left Arpad and the court of the Philistine King at Gath. He travelled to Libna and Shochoh swiftly on a mule through the hills and at last came in sight of Bethlehem, and then he set the mule free in the trees. He could see the heights shutting out a view of Jerusalem.

Like many of his people, he spoke Hebrew well. King David's army occupied Bethlehem and the hills and valleys near, in separate detachments. There were camels and horses and mules in great numbers. After making an estimate of the number of Jews in the army round Bethlehem, in the evening Bolon stole across the hills and in an hour and a half had reached the boundaries of Jerusalem. There, in a Bedouin tent, outside the walls, while talking over bread and salt, he learned the strength of David's forces in the capital.

David had deployed the greater part of his army under Joab into the Bethlehem district. It was his rule to deploy his troops in the surrounding country and so anticipate attack from any quarter. Numbers of tents were in the valley of Rephaim and many near to Bethlehem.

Bolon had the soldier's trained eye. To conquer this army would need all the Philistine forces. It was clear David would make no immediate changes in the disposition of his troops. The Philistine army could travel the whole distance from Gath to Bethlehem in two days. It would take him one day at least to go to Gath on his mule or without it. Again scanning by the early morning light the district from the heights about Jerusalem looking towards Bethlehem, five and a half miles away, he saw clearly the disposition of King David's troops, and he knew the proportion of them in Bethlehem was not large. He had natural force made greater because the honour of his family was in his hands. He sought

the eager king at Gath and gave him information. Arpad summoned his captains and planned the march.

"All our people must go in the end," he said.

In four hours from the time of Bolon's arrival the troops were ready, and the whole Philistine army moved towards Bethlehem. Bolon, at the general's right hand, and still in the robes of a Jew, marched with them. The Philistine general sent one section of his troops to a big defile to the west of Bethlehem, and another to the field of Boaz, where a portion of David's troops were under Abishai.

In the early morning Abishai was attacked by the Philistine troops on two sides, and forces under the anxious Joab left Bethlehem to support him.

Now the section of the Philistine army under King Arpad attacked Bethlehem in far greater numbers than the Israelites, and after a fierce contest, in which many were slain, entered it and a spear carrying a flag was raised upon its battlements.

Meanwhile the angry Joab, Abishai and Attai knew they were playing a hopeless game. A skilful general makes a masterly retreat, and Joab withdrew his forces swiftly into the great hills north of the field of Boaz. Arpad put most of his troops, a powerful garrison, in Bethlehem.

From the hills north of the field of Boaz, Joab sent a swift runner to David in Jerusalem to say that Bethlehem had been taken by the Philistines.

David received and heard the excited messenger. He frowned darkly. "The devils have stolen our gateway, but Jerusalem shall not fall! By the sun of Joshua, Bethlehem shall once more be ours."

David placed his troops under command of the Tachmonite chief among the captains, and with him was Adino, who had slain with his own hand hundreds of Philistines. Then, with his Gibborim, David marched to meet Joab. David's anger almost fled when he saw the rage in Joab's face.

David had one quality transcending all others: he had humour, without which no man can be truly great. Joab had

no sense of humour, but he was a resolute fighter and his military pride had been sorely hurt. With David he had conquered Jerusalem, and that the Philistines should be almost within a spear's flight from the capital drove him to fury.

David's first satirical words were: "Where were thy spies, Joab? Spies have conquered us."

Joab's rabid eyes met the quiet glowing eyes of David. Then he spat it out. "The spy that hath done this was a Jerad among spies."

King David started and frowned. "Ay, a Jerad! Jerad—Jerad had a brother. Jerad——!" He stood in meditation for a moment. Then he placed a hand upon Joab's shoulder. "To be beaten once is naught; to be beaten twice is all! This day——!"

His eyes took on a prophetic look, his body straightened. He was again as he had been when he fought Goliath.

He turned to his brother Nethaneel, who had listened. "Nethaneel, thou art too old to fight. Get thee to thy home."

Nethaneel's small eyes nearly closed. He stretched an arm and said fiercely: "There is none in thine armies I would not fight!"

David nodded in approval. "We are of the same bone and flesh, Nethaneel! Come now the last trial of our family faith."

Nethaneel pointed to the Philistines in Bethlehem and said sourly: "If one of Jerad's blood is behind this shame, may my sword do justice to thee!"

David, though time had greyed his hair, was as bold in body as he had ever been. He pointed out the shouting Philistines to Joab. "In their throats we will choke that shouting back. Joab, let a calf be slain and cut in two, and our armies shall march between. It is the ancient covenant. Today the covenant Jehovah made with Abraham shall be made again with me. Before the Philistines let this be done."

And so between Bethlehem and Jerusalem the calf was killed, and the Israelite army, stern and resolute, passed between.

Arpad, with his Philistine army, seeing this ritual from the hills of Bethlehem and the plains of Rephaim, gathered his troops to attack. But David, knowing it was not the time to fight such powerful forces, withdrew his army swiftly to the caves of Adullam.

Lokman, as they neared the caves, said: "David, this is night with no moon and stars, but day will come again." David did not answer but shrugged a shoulder.

It was harvest time. The grain was ripe, and the Israelite troops marched with virile feet towards the caves of Adullam, for they had the inspiring guidance of the greatest leader Israel ever had. David's spirit was in them all, and under Joab and Abishai and Ittai and Benaiah the troops drilled, and in David's cave at Adullam a light was ever burning.

He was seated at the cave door one night looking upon the moonlit sky. As he sat brooding, a hastening Jewish figure, stopped by his orderlies, came near. David called to his orderlies. "Admit the man."

The man entered—an ardent Israelite, old and fearless in face. David scanned him closely. "Who art thou?"

"My name is Zelek. I gave food and drink to Bolon, a Philistine. He was a brother of Jerad. Bolon came to Israel to warn his brother, and he saw the dead Jerad being carried by the Gibborim. On his homeward way he stopped at my home, and after our ancient custom I fed him and gave him drink."

"Is that all?"

"Not all. My last words to him were: 'The blessing of Jehovah be upon thee.' His to me were: 'The blessing of Baal be upon thee, and when thou comest to my country I will do to thee as thou hast done to me.'" He frowned. "That man has betrayed our people. He acted for his brother, and he came to spy!"

David inclined his head, and he looked with friendly eyes at Zelek. "Thou shalt eat and drink with me as thou didst with the Philistine."

So they sat and ate and drank, and David said at the end: "Stay in this camp and watch."

At length David had the grateful Jew taken to his quarters.

From Hebron south-east of Adullam and the plain of Mamre, from Bethzur, Meronoth, Rabbah to the west of Adullam, Shochoh, Bethleptha, Jamoth, Engannim and as far north as Bethshemeth and Timnath and Zorah, Joab gathered camels and mules in great numbers.

One day David spoke to Joab. "We shall strike these people for the last time. I want one thousand camels, a thousand mules, a thousand brown and black horses and five hundred white horses."

Joab with an amazed eye said inquiringly: "Five hundred white horses?"

David's eyes half closed. "I dreamed I saw a dozen white horses coming towards me with white tails shaking in the sun. I want five hundred."

"Thou hast a mystical mind, my master."

"The rise of a shepherd boy to be King may be mystical; but his mind is like the rocks of this Promised Land."

Joab made obeisance. "If there are five *thousand* white horses in Israel, thou shalt have them."

So day by day the camels and the horses gathered, and meanwhile the steady training of the army went on. There were many caves and depressions at Adullam, and Joab hid from the harrying Philistines the steady growth of camels, horses and mules.

The Philistines were at Bethlehem town and in the valley of Rephaim east of Bethlehem and between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. They dared not attack Jerusalem yet. They must crush David and his army before they struck the holy city. Day by day went on the training of spearmen and

swordsmen and a thousand left-handed men of Benjamin and others with slings and stones.

One night David said: "O that one would give me to drink water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate."

Whereupon Abishai, Benaiah and Eliezer, hearing, left Adullam and went swiftly and silently towards Bethlehem, avoiding cleverly the Philistine forces. They were only outposts, and once they were challenged, but they sprang on the two outposts and before they could shout choked and stabbed them to death. In constant danger they came to the town of Bethlehem, where was the most hazardous part of their work. They had to climb up the side of a steep hill to get the water from the well by the gate.

Nearing the well, they were challenged, but Benaiah sprang upon the Philistine guard, prevented him shouting by keeping his hand at his mouth, then choked him to death. They got an urn of water from the well and stole down the side of the hill again and made their way to the caves of Adullam. Their lives had been in constant danger.

They passed through the lines of forces and came to David's cave. David gazed at them in wonder. Abishai said:

"The water of the well of Bethlehem is thine, O King. Drink it in the name of Israel."

But David, in solemn spirit, took the urn and gazed at it.

"Be it far from me to do this! Is not this the blood of you that went in jeopardy of your lives for Israel's sake and mine? I will not drink it."

He ceremoniously poured it out upon the ground and moved his hands over it. Then he turned to them and stroked their beards. "This is our sign by which we shall conquer in the coming fight."

From the shadow of the tent behind him, Bathsheba came slowly forward. She looked at the three men, she saw the dawn breaking through the open doorway and she bowed solemnly to the three. Then she raised a hand in greeting and farewell, and stepped back into the shade again.

David watched her go with a smiling approval, then he gently spoke. "Get ye gone to your duties, my brothers."

They bowed reverently and left the tent.

Presently fell loud shouting and turmoil, and Joab came with Bolon, the brother of Jerad, clothed as a Jew. Beside Joab was Zelek, and many people followed after.

Bolon held his head erect and looked David squarely in the eyes. David, who understood, sternly regarded him.

"Thy brother came as a spy. Yet he became one of my Gibborim and died a Jew. Thou hast carried on his work. Zelek here gave thee food and shelter and this is thy return! Thou didst spy for thy people, I act for mine. Thou shalt die!"

From the shadows of the cave behind David, Leah slowly came. Hearing David, her face paled. Bolon was the brother of Jerad. Loyalty to her dead love overcame her. She did not speak, but stood brooding.

Bolon bowed his head. "My brother was a spy and a traitor to his own people. I became a spy to do his work. Through me we have taken Bethlehem. For Jerad's sake I go to my grave, but not in these Jewish rags!" He touched his breast disdainfully. "Let me die in the robes of a Philistine!"

David liked his courage and straightforwardness. He looked at him calmly. "Thou shalt die in Philistine clothes—not in those of a Jew, which thou dost shame. Get thee gone to thy fate."

Bolon was led away by Joab's officers, hands tied behind his back. Then Joab's men went to find Philistine clothing for Bolon's death at dawn.

Leah sat sorrowing upon her bed. "But Jerad's brother shall not die."

She, like David, loved courage and the straight thing, and there was in her an adventurous temper. In face and figure how like Jerad Bolon had looked! It was as though Jerad had been sent out to die. Madness possessed her now.

At midnight, when all the camp was still, Leah stole from her tent and came cautiously to where Bolon was confined. With the dawn Bolon should die—that was the King's command!

Bolon was in a cave with two entrances, one facing the troops, the other, much smaller, facing the dark. Leah moved swiftly and silently. The soldier on guard at the smaller entrance did not see her as he stepped to and fro. When his back was turned she slipped through the narrow entrance into the cave.

No one was there save Bolon. A dim light was burning. Bolon, who had been lying down, drew himself up. She put her finger to her lips.

"Thy brother Jerad was my lover. I have come to set thee free. But put off these Philistine clothes and go in Jewish robes."

She freed Bolon's hands. "Upon thyself now rests escape," she said. She turned her back. Swiftly Bolon stripped and put on the Jewish robe.

"Now come with me," Leah said. With hard beating hearts they walked out of the small opening and calmly passed the guarding soldier, who thought they must have come by the larger entrance. Because the man was dressed as a Jew he did not stop them.

Before they parted Bolon said to Leah: "Danger is for thee now." He raised her hand and kissed it. She snatched it away—that she could not bear.

Then she stole away swiftly and went to her own cave through the sleeping soldiers. She sat upon her bed of rugs, and, as on that startling night when she and Jerad had met in the chamber of the palace, she buried her face in her hands.

Dawn came and with it the fierce shouting of the camp. Bolon's escape was known and his Philistine robes were there. Presently Leah realized that her cave was circled by shouting soldiers and camp-followers.

The soldier who had stood on guard at the cave where Bolon was confined now said to the people: "I saw her leave the cave with him." Beside the soldier stood Zelek.

The soldiers and the people shouted, for emotion was deep in them. That a niece of King David should help Bolon to escape drove them to frenzy. They seized her roughly and were about to kill her, but King David swiftly came. Zelek told him all. He looked at Leah, pale and stern.

"Thou didst save my life in Jerusalem. Thou didst go much among the poor and needy and they loved thee. Thou hast been close to me ever, in good and dark days, but thou shalt die. Prepare for death! Thou hast betrayed——"

Leah interrupted. "I have ever loved thee and Israel. I repent not saving the brother of the man I loved, but I loved Israel always—always!"

David frowned. "Get thee to Bolon's cave. Thou shalt die."

In silence Leah was taken away. He had condemned his beloved niece to death.

Nethaneel, who had come with David, looked at the vast crowds, and his body shook with emotion. Though Leah was his daughter, he could not intervene. In gloom he went to his tent.

Never had the army or the people been so moved. Yet never had the personal power of David shown so greatly as in this crisis of his family and his people. It tore his heart that one he had loved deeply should be so vile.

Even Bathsheba could not comfort him.

"Away—away! I live my dark hour alone!" he said.

CHAPTER LIV

THE GATEWAY OF JERUSALEM

THROUGH the whole of one night David's troops—camels, mules, horses and spearmen and swordsmen and slingers—marched silently through Timnath, Gibeah, Beth-Zecharias and Etam to the heights of Gallim, nearer Jerusalem than Bethlehem. The Philistines had few outposts, as was their custom, and Gallim was not well defended. Every man on guard at the hill was killed before dawn. The sun rose with brilliant and lovely shimmer of rose and mauve and saffron and tender violet, and all the hills were shining. From the heights of Gallim David could see the town of Bethlehem.

Arpad, the Philistine King, in Bethlehem, seeing that David had taken Gallim, said to Bolon: "They have captured our chief outpost. Yonder is David scanning our forces. Beyond doubt he—I know his bearing. Thy spying has given us Bethlehem, but with the Hebrews on those heights it ends there."

Bolon replied: "I gave thee Bethlehem—Baal will give thee Jerusalem."

He spoke with decision and courage, but he did not feel it. Seeing the vast number of David's troops—camels, horses, mules, men with slings and spears and swords—moving steadily toward Bethlehem, he knew the odds were against the Philistine army. Arpad looked out on the marching hosts, saw them divided into three forces, and said: "We shall stay them now."

He summoned his chief general. "Strike now with all our men."

The Philistines were in the valley of Rephaim and of Jeshimon, and they now drew nearer to Bethlehem.

To Joab, David spoke with decision: "Today by God's help we will drive these jackals from my path for ever.

Abishai and Ittai will be to the right of Bethlehem, myself and Jehoshaphat and Abinadab and Benaiah in the centre, and thou to the left. The horses and the mules shall be with thee and Seraiah and Jonadab, but the camels and white horses with me. With you shall be three-fourths of the swordsmen and spearmen. We shall be fighting for our own, our foes for stolen goods. My brothers Nethaneel and Eliab shall be under thee, Joab. Raddai and Ozem and Shammah shall be with Abishai and Ittai. My four sons—Adonijah, Chileab, Ithream and Nogah—shall have command under me."

The first section of the Philistines were attacked by Abishai and Ittai in the steep valley to the right of Bethlehem. There the fighting was desperate and the destruction was great. At last the Philistines fled in all directions. To the left, Joab's troops, with Nethaneel and Eliab, attacked the Philistines, and here the battle was violent and heavy, and they fought them up the hills towards Jerusalem.

Nethaneel, near to Joab, fighting hard, at last saw Bolon in command of a troop not far off. Light burned in Nethaneel's small eyes, and he fought his way to Bolon. Facing him with fury, he growled:

"Damned spy, thou shalt eat iron now!" and he smote at Bolon. But Bolon said: "Thou Hebrew hog, to black night thou shalt go."

So they fiercely fought, and the expert Bolon sorely wounded Nethaneel, but at last with massive strength Nethaneel drove his spear through Bolon's body, and with a shuddering groan he fell dead upon the field.

Nethaneel, in agony from his deadly wound, looked at him. "To Gehenna, thou spoiler of our people! It was given me to slay thee." He spat on the dead body. Then he fell with a stark smile heavily upon the ground.

The general fight went on. Bolon's men seeing him fall, were cowed and fled, the Jews killing them greatly.

The day wore on. In the centre was David with his

camels and white horses. The Philistine King now lost heart, for the sun was in the eyes of his men and behind the Jews. He saw moving towards him camels, and among the horses was a group of white horses with waving tails in the blinding light.

David and his own troops came now to close quarters with Arpad. David's spearmen and swordsmen and the left-handed men of Benjamin with their slings drew near to the Philistine king and his staff.

In another part of the field Adonijah was slaughtering with fierce hand—his horse had been killed—Philistine foes who almost took his life, but he who was to turn against his father in future days fought for Israel now, as all David's family had ever fought, with energy and valour. They were Jews first and last. This day was the triumph of Jewry.

Now at last David came face to face with Arpad. He had longed for this all the trying and bloody day. Arpad was taller than David. David's shield was in his hand, his spear ready to thrust, his eye was stern and his body firm.

Arpad said scornfully: "Thou fightest him to whom thou wast vassal and shalt again be vassal, cur of Israel!"

Then he drove hard at David with his spear, but his eyes were in the light, and David's back was to it. With his shield David protected himself and ever kept his back to the light during the contest. It was here that three of David's sons, Chileab, Nogah and Ithream fought the forces surrounding David seeking to kill him. They were armed with swords and spears and rode white horses, and they fought tenaciously the huge forces of the fierce Philistines who would have saved Arpad. Chileab's spear went through the body of one of Ashdod, whose sword was raised above David's head, and Nogah and Ithream fought successfully with foes fighting with the courage of despair.

For many minutes the desperate strife went on. At last David drove his spear through the heart of the Philistine King and he fell mortally wounded.

Arpad gasped. "Baal, Baal, take thou my spirit." He raised himself to speak again, but fell back dead.

David placed his foot on the neck of the King, in the ancient rule of the East, then gave orders for due care of the body. It should be decently buried.

David, with the Gibborim, then joined the fighting elsewhere, and with the sun in their eyes the Philistines failed everywhere.

Arpad's people shouted and fled; they could not resist the conquering Israelites.

"Baal—Baal, help us!" was shouted, but Baal did not hear.

"Jehovah—Jehovah is with us!" called the Israelites, and they drove the foe always. Shouts of despair came from the Philistine army. Confusion was among them, but splendid organization was with the Hebrews and they broke the Philistine forces right and left and in the centre. They drove them, killing as they went, towards the Dead Sea and north towards the Jordan and west hopelessly towards their own country.

Then at last two thousand Philistines, with women and children, fled to the field of Boaz, and another five thousand to the valley leading to the Dead Sea on the other side of Bethlehem. The Jews surrounded the two thousand at the field of Boaz to drive in on them, but the chief Philistine, Hogath, seeing their danger, with no food before and the barren hills of Judea and the Dead Sea in front, said: "We are lost. These pagans will destroy us. They outnumber us five times. One thing only now to do." He hastily talked with his Philistine friends, and they nodded. Then he and they kissed their women and children and said to them: "Ye shall not die by the hands of these Jewish dogs, but we who love ye will slay ye." Then, with agony in their faces, they drove their daggers through the bodies of their wives and children and they fell dead at their feet. The men gazed at them implacably. Then all save the ten lay down by their

slain women and children and gazed for the last time into the burning sky. "O Earth, farewell," they murmured.

Swiftly the ten slew them all one by one and they died silently. Then the strongest of the ten, weeping, slew the rest and with agonized call to Baal fell upon his own sword and sank upon the reeking ground.

With horrified amazement the Jewish army saw this sacrifice of life. David in the distance saw it all grimly.

There on the field of Boaz lay two thousand Philistines dead, and in the valley beyond Bethlehem five thousand were slain by the Hebrews amid lamentations and helpless calls to Baal. In all parts of this wide field the slaughter went on.

David with his troops now assaulted the city of Bethlehem, and as the Philistines were disorganized and broken by the death of Arpad and Bolon and many chief generals, they could only feebly resist, and they fled from the city, being slain as they went. David now gave orders for the Philistine spear and flag to be lowered, and this was done, and then with his own hand he set up his spear with a flag attached on the battlements and looked out on the fleeing foes. He had been fighting since early morning, and he now turned his face to Adullam, where Leah was in prison. Dropping his head in his hand, he said: "Jehovah, giver of victory, help me do this dark duty."

Lokman had found Nethaneel, and he stooped sadly over him. Nethaneel, now conscious, huskily said: "I have slain Bolon the spy, yonder he lies dead." He lifted himself up slowly. "My daughter shall not die! My hand has saved her!" Then he fell back dead.

Lokman ran to Bethlehem city. Finding David there, he touched his arm. "Nethaneel has killed Bolon!"

The King's look instantly changed. "Bolon is dead—Bolon is dead!" He gave a sigh of relief.

"I grieve, but Nethaneel is also gone."

David's eyes dimmed. "Nethaneel—Nethaneel gone!" His body swayed in agony of spirit.

"But he has saved his daughter."

In his distress David had not thought of that. "Thou speakest true, Lokman. Leah is saved! Jehovah, Thou art our shield; in Thee is peace for Israel."

He turned to Benaiah and Lokman. "Tell it far and wide."

Benaiah and Lokman, with a few Gibborim, ran through the hosts telling the great news. Israelites, hearing that Nethaneel had killed Bolon the spy, shouted: "Praise to Jehovah!"

At last the battle ended, Joab came to David in Bethlehem. Covered with dust and blood, he proudly spoke. "King David, thou hast conquered. Thy feet are on Mount Hermon!"

Two hours later, while the Hebrews were still slaying the Philistines, Leah, glad of the tremendous victory, was brought from Adullam to David in conquered Bethlehem. On seeing her, all shouted: "Leah is free—Leah is free!"

King David embraced her before them all. "Dost thou not hear, Leah? Thou art free!"

Joy was in her eyes. She did not know it was her own father who had slain Bolon.

Nethaneel's body was now brought by Benaiah's men towards the King. When Leah saw her father's body coming she cried in anguish: "My father—oh, my father!"

To comfort her the King said: "He killed Bolon. He freed thee, Leah."

"Then why did they not tell me who brought me here?"

"They were forbidden."

Nethaneel's body was laid upon the ground. Weeping and broken-hearted, Leah embraced her father's body. "Thou didst die for me! Farewell, beloved. Thou art at peace now."

David stooped and kissed his rugged face. "My brother, thy words were black, but thy deeds were white!"

Standing up at last, Leah turned to the vast throngs come from the field of battle. She did not speak, but she raised both hands towards them.

The sky took on the amber and saffron glow of evening, and Nethaneel's body was carried away by the Gibborim, the prophet Nathan in front of it.

With the King beside her, Leah moved towards her father's grave, amid shouts of victory and wailing. The army and all Israel honoured this valiant man.

Near the Well of Bethlehem, which David had made famous, the body of Nethaneel was laid. In the hollowed rock which was his tomb, David had these words carved:

"I will lay me down in peace and take my rest."

CHAPTER LV

THE HILL OF GABRAOTH

THERE fell a long famine in Israel, and David, through the prophet Nathan, inquired of the Lord the cause. The answer came that it was punishment for the slaying of the Gibeonites by Saul. The pledge had been made with Joshua that they should not be slain when Jericho and Ai were destroyed but should be servants of the congregation, and they had ever been exempt from punishment since then, but Saul had slain them.

In great anxiety because of the famine and the many deaths, David sent for the Gibeonites. He questioned them, and they reminded him of the covenant with Joshua.

David offered them gold and silver in compensation, but they shook their heads. "No, for the lives of our people we demand human lives—the lives of the family of him who broke the covenant—of King Saul!"

David was startled. "Ye will not take gold and silver? Here is much."

"No, we will take only Saul's family!"

"What will ye do with them?"

"We will hang them against the wall."

In great woe David spoke. "This tears my soul. I will not give you Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, but the other sons and grandsons of Saul ye shall have."

So, there were handed over to the triumphant Gibeonites whom Saul had saved from the Ammonites before he was crowned, the five sons of Merab and the sons of Saul by Rizpah—Armoni and Mephibosheth.

When Rizpah heard of her sons' arrest she hurried to David's palace.

With flaming eyes, she said: "Thou saidst I should have peace here, but thou givest my sons to the Gibeonites. My sons are all I have of Saul. They are dear to me as Absalom was to thee. Thou shalt not do this."

David's face flushed. "Thy sons shall die. I will keep my pledge. To make the Gibeonites again friends of Israel the sons and grandsons of Saul go to them."

"Thou didst never try to kill Saul though he was in thy power more than once. Saul built up Israel, and thou hast made it greater. O, prove thy greatness by breaking this black pledge! What are the Gibeonites to thee? In Judah Saul ploughed the fields as thou didst walk the hills with thy sling. Judah was his and thine—wilt thou then destroy his children? They are the sole comfort of my life."

David replied sternly: "Saul's family shall die!"

Rizpah threw herself at his feet, unbound her hair and tore open her robe. "Saul's children drew their life from these breasts. I am not of thy people, yet deep in me is the soul of Israel. They shall not hang—before thy God, Jehovah, no!"

"Get thee to thy feet—go to thy home! The sons and grandsons of Saul shall die!"

In despair Rizpah slowly rose and staggered from his

presence. She went wailing through the streets to her home, the people wondering.

When the five sons of Merab were seized, Michal at once sought David. Her face was white with anger, her body trembled.

"David, I loved Merab's children. They are dearer to me than all else in the world. Thou hast given them to the Gibeonites because of my father's sin. Thou takest my one life's comfort—what have I left?"

David spoke grimly. "Thy father broke faith with the Gibeonites. The sons of Adriel and Merab shall die for his crime."

"To slay these children degrades thy name. Deny thyself this shame!"

David was exasperated. "The sons of Saul by Rizpah and the children thou hast nourished shall hang against the wall. Get thee gone, Michal!"

In agony Michal left him and fled, demented, to her chamber.

Rizpah had placed Saul's two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth * in the school of the prophets at Ramah. There they won the friendship of all. At the head of the school was the seer, Gad. He gave special care to the education of these sons, and when David's Gibborim seized them Gad's anger grew, and all the students condemned the King.

These sons of Saul were handsome, clever and kindhearted. They had been friends with all, and now in their youth they were to be hanged for their father's crime. Armoni was fair-haired with dark-blue eyes and very tall and strong like Saul, and in Mephibosheth was the depth of spirit and the fierce but noble temperament of his mother.

When, under Benaiah, the Gibborim came to arrest them, Mephibosheth would have fiercely resisted, but Benaiah swiftly disarmed him. "David has declared that for the sins of your

* Not the son of Jonathan.

father ye must go. Your father was a King and he broke the covenant with the Gibeonites."

Mephibosheth quietly yielded. "Life is deep in us. We have lived here in peace. We go to be hanged by Gibeon for our father's sin." He took his brother's hand. "Come, Armoni."

Armoni pressed his hand. "For the sin of Saul, we shall unjustly die."

So it was that under Benaiah, whose heart ached at his ugly task, they marched to Jerusalem.

It was David's will that Mephibosheth and Armoni should not meet their mother before they were hung. That agony was spared them. They were handed over to the Gibeonites at Gabraoth, and the young men bore themselves bravely. They gently greeted the sons of Merab, and then they were led to the hill on which they were to yield their lives. Of royal blood, they carried themselves in the clouded morning as though they were going to an affair of state. Their heads did not droop, they were left unbound and they kept their shoulders square. Though their faces were pale, no emotion made them tremble. They were the sons and grandsons of a king, and they would not show fear before these foes of Saul. All life had been before them, and now on this hill they would cease to see the skies of the land where they were born.

The Gibeonites did not use them roughly, and the Gibeonite women mourned to see these brave young men go to their deaths. At the top of the hill their hands were bound behind them, and they looked eagerly round the hills of Judah, which they would see no more.

"Saul, my father, I come to thee!" said Armoni, and one of Merab's sons, looking at the fleeting clouds and the flowers and trees, smiled wanly. "A year or a day—yet we all must go. Jehovah, give me Thy peace!"

The spear of the Gibeonite chief was swiftly lowered, and death hid these young eyes forever from this world.

Benaiah, standing on the edge of the vast crowd, murmured: "A dark day for Israel."

A Gibeonite, hearing this, said: "Nay, the sky of Israel is clear again."

Suddenly the sky blackened and all the land grew dark, as though Jehovah frowned at this black deed by David.

Rizpah came in the dusk, and when she saw her sons against the black sky, she cried aloud in her agony, and the Gibeonite women came round her pityingly, but she would have none of them.

Later Rizpah took sackcloth and spread it on a rock. There she would sit day by day, week after week, month after month, and suffer neither the birds of the air nor the beasts of the field to come near her dear ones. She kept away the jackals and hyenas by night. In the first sign of dawn no wings could be seen, but presently a griffon would come, and then vultures, eagles, kites, buzzards and ravens would circle round the bodies, till the air was dark with them. And ever with branches of a carob tree, swinging them constantly, kept them off, and at last they ceased to come that day, and she rested, but with the first signs of dawn they came again.

Her face grew haggard, her body thin, her beauty unearthly, but she stayed on through the drought, while passing folk shook their heads in sorrow. Some tried to win her from her direful task, but she would not be moved.

The Gibeonites understood her grief and respected it. They had only taken payment of a pledge after ancient custom. They would have driven anyone else away, but when they saw Rizpah prepare to remain they did naught. So it was that on the hills of Gabraoth a thing was done that gave Israel shame and individuals sore hurt. The bodies of Saul's family swung in the wind. They were emblems of a time when blood and death were the prices paid for a broken pledge. Jehovah struck hard and his people struck harder. His were acts of punishment, theirs were acts of cruelty; His were solemn and stern; theirs were grim and mechanical.

CHAPTER LVI

DAVID'S REPENTANCE

WORD had come to Ramah of the slaying of Rizpah's sons at the barley harvest in April, and also that by Gabraoth Hill she drove off the wild birds and beasts from their bodies until the autumn rains would come. At last young men from Ramah school marched through Bethlehem for Jerusalem in protest against the killing of Rizpah's and Merab's sons. David was born in Bethlehem and they had gone there to move the people. They were led by the grey-bearded Gad, ever David's stern critic and faithful friend.

David's brother Eliab saw Gad and his students in Bethlehem, and his feelings went with them. He hastened to the palace at Jerusalem.

David saw his agitation. "Why art thou troubled, Eliab?"

"Ramah is against thee. They condemn the hanging of the sons of Saul. The hill of Gabraoth is a menace to thy name."

David was stunned by Eliab's strong protest. It caused him to consider the making of the pledge to the Gibeonites, who were a section of the Hittites with cities near Jerusalem. Gibeon was on the slope of a hill overlooking a wide fertile valley, and near it was a large reservoir of water making "The Pool of Gibeon."

Eliab looked at him with sage reproof, and David struggled with his own mind and soul. He had kept faith with the Gibeonites, but he had forgotten about the trickery of the pledge with Joshua. David had acted with a soul of impulse and natural truth and had never come to logical grips with the facts till Eliab had challenged him. Eager to abolish the famine and keep faith, he had done grave injustice. These lads had been sacrificed, and none of Saul's family was left as possible rival for his throne. Now he knew that his act was open to meanest misconstruction by the unfriendly. He had

not thought of this, but there were those in Israel who did, and feeling had turned against him.

David sat long in silence. Dimly he heard the song of birds, the confused noises out in the city, the cry of the mineral-water seller, the beat of the blacksmith's iron, the calls of the people, the braying of the donkeys and the camels' droning. As music awakens dreams that have nothing direct to do with it, so in the sounds of the city, vision had come to David. He struggled with his inner thoughts, and at last he said to Eliab:

"I did my duty as King; I kept the covenant. But I know now there is a deeper thing—the pledge to the soul of Israel." These words cleared the sky of national morality. They showed a new spirit in David. "I go to the hill of Gabraoth. Come." He put his hand on Eliab's shoulder and they went from the chamber.

An hour later through Jerusalem David travelled, with four of his brothers and with Joab, Benaiah, Jehoshaphat, Elhanan, Helex, Zalmon, Adoniram, Sheva, Lokman and others, to the fatal hill. There sat Rizpah in her sackcloth keeping watch over her dead. She saw him come with his court, and the tragedy of her eyes deepened.

David grieved to see this once beautiful woman now worn and wan, yet with eyes wherein was the spirit of the immortals of the past. Naught could move her from her dreadful task. All she loved on earth was gone. She was now rigid and stark in body, yet she still had a faded beauty. She little knew or cared that the eyes of Israel and Gibeon were on her. Sitting with long palm branches she waved away the wild beasts and birds from her beloved dead. They were the children of a king, and he who gave them to death was behind her now. She would ever hate the hand that hurt her.

David came closer, but she did not speak. She turned her unearthly eyes to his sombre face. They only said: "Thou canst hurt me no more!"

From her eyes' undying scorn David turned mournfully away. While life lasted they would haunt him. He had kept the faith of a king, but he had flayed his own soul.

As they went back to Jerusalem they met Gad and the excited students of Ramah. The figure of Gad was erect, his beard was white, his small eyes burned fire. He spoke sternly in a loud voice:

"From the hill of death, O King, come to the bar of the justice of God!"

All were stunned by these words, for the King, grown great before Jewry, was immune from public attack. It was the ancient duty of a prophet moving Gad now, as it had moved Eli and Samuel.

David spoke calmly. "I kept the ancient pledge, but this was a lesser duty than that to the spirit of Israel." He bowed his head in woe and all were amazed at his humiliation. They whispered together.

There was a short, painful silence. Then Gad said: "Thou didst gravely shame Israel. Thou didst greatly sin!"

David lifted his head. His voice was loud and firm. "Here I give myself to the mercy of God."

This startled all. Gad was moved and quieted. His face changed colour, his eyes softened. This was a king who did not hesitate to own his sin before all his court and people. It showed modesty on his part, courage, and an august repentance. Gad raised a hand. "God's mercy be on thee now, David. We leave behind us a forgiven King. Farewell!"

David's repentance had struck deep into the souls of Gad and the students. Without sound save the soft pad of their feet, they turned and walked back towards Ramah.

When Gad and his students were gone, David's eyes met those of Lokman. He beckoned Lokman to him. Somehow with this jester beside him his mind was ever quieter, for he knew Lokman's unchangeable truth. For long they walked in silence, Lokman at his side. At length David pointed to

the sky. "See yonder mist passing before the sun! I am that mist, but I know the sun will conquer me sometime!"

Lokman shook his head gravely. "Thou art no mist, David. In the sun's light thou dost live. Through it thou hast conquered today."

Never perhaps in all Jewish history had there been such a scene as this: the King of Israel who had conquered many peoples, had built up a temporal power which was the wonder of the East, abasing himself before his people and the prophet and the students of Ramah! That was David. He had honesty of soul and no vanity. He had sinned and would sin again, but he was far from littleness. He was loftier than any among whom he lived and laboured. Here in the hills of Judah where he was born, the love of God rose above all else. Sin—of course he sinned, but he was greater than any sin, a child of Adam whose son Cain slew Abel. He was as one who sees behind the clouds the sun of life. In sin was the spur to pierce his soul's side.

He raised his head, forgot all by whom he was surrounded, and with sorrowful heart he said: "Man is like a thing of naught; his time passeth away as doth a shadow."

Amid the cheering of his people David returned to his palace.

Rizpah lived on. In this world her life had ended with the death of her sons. To the hour of her lonely going her soul was bitter against David. He had taken what was more than all else in life.

She was welcomed at Ramah by Gad the prophet until he died and then by his successor. There she would go every year, and, looking towards Bethlehem, she seemed to see Saul anointed and leave his plough and send the remnant of the oxen slain throughout Israel. She saw his conquests and defeats and his stupendous failings. She saw himself and his sons killed at Gilboa. Her own two sons were gone, and Ruth in her leprosy was never more lonely than this sad

woman. Here at Ramah, where all remembered them tenderly, she spent quiet days, and here she passed beyond this world and peace was come to her at last.

CHAPTER LVII

THE GOING OF MICHAL

DAVID had said to Michal: "Get thee from my presence. The men shall die."

When Michal in agony had hastened to her chamber, she fell upon the floor and moaned in despair. Abigail and Ahinoam, David's wives, had seen the demented Michal fly to her chamber and in pity they followed her. Stooping over her, Abigail said: "Michal, thou didst love Merab's children and they are gone from thee. Thou hast only left thyself and thy sorrow."

Michal moaned. "Nothing is for me now but the tomb."

Ahinoam replied: "Nay, nay, thou shalt live, Michal." They carried her to her bed, then they drew back her hair and wound it up, and Abigail kissed her cheeks. Michal lay grieving, her fingers clutching spasmodically at her breast.

"David wronged thee much, but thou wert his first wife—his first love."

Michal started up. "A curse upon my life with him! He has broken all for which I lived and cared. Curse him!"

Abigail and Ahinoam understood. They caught her trembling fingers in their own. Pity and sympathy were in their hearts. They both had children and their children were alive. She had no children and now no love, and her sister's children were to be slain by the Gibeonites. She was in the very pit of tragedy.

The prophet Nathan came, but he could not comfort her. She heard him, she accepted his blessing, but her soul had no peace. Day in, day out, life grew feebler with her. She ate

not and she grew weaker as time went on. Often Leah came and with the others tried to ease her spirit.

At last, after the sinister fate of Merab's sons, Benaiah came. When he entered Michal's chamber she started up, her eyes ablaze with fury. "Thou didst take my sister's children to be slain—I curse thee!"

"I obeyed the command of the King—I come to tell thee of the noble death of thy sister's sons."

His eyes grew dim. He could go no further. His feelings were overcome.

Michal saw the reality in the man and in his face. "Speak on, Benaiah," she said with anger abated.

"They were all unbound until they came to the fatal hill. Merab's children looked round on the Judah they should see no more, and I heard one say: 'A day or a year, yet we all must go.' Another said: 'Jehovah, I come to Thee.' They carried themselves as though they were marching in war to victory, and all admired their noble bearing and heroism."

Benaiah bowed his head in sorrow, and Michal murmured. "I no longer curse thee though thou didst take my sister's sons to die. Thy heart is that of a good man." She fell back in Leah's arms, and Benaiah turned and sadly left the chamber.

One day she lay in silence, then she half raised herself and gasped for breath. She knew the end was near. With fading eyes, she said: "Leah, send for the King." Then she tried to gain control of her trembling body, and Leah held her hands and murmured comfort to her.

There was silence save for Michal's broken breathing and the song of the birds without the palace walls.

At last David entered the chamber of death with the prophet Nathan and others. When he looked at Michal his heart smote him.

Michal gazed mournfully at the King. "My heart is broken. I have no wish to live, David. I go now to my long rest. Thou hast slain my sister's children. With their

courage I also face the darkness that must come—and then the everlasting light."

David stooped over her. "Michal, I repent that I slew the children of Merab and the sons of thy father. Time can never wipe out my account, but may Jehovah forgive!"

The great pain and misery of Michal's face passed away, and a peaceful look came. She reached up both arms. Her heart was in her fading eyes. Her voice was going fast. "David, my lord, my King! I forgive thee. Wilt thou kiss me?"

David knelt and gathered her to his heart and kissed her. "Michal—Michal!" he said, while her head dropped back lifeless in his arms.

Nathan shook his grey head. "Alas that Time's troubles should do as they have done."

CHAPTER LVIII

THE REBELLION OF ADONIJAH

FROM the commanding height of Jerusalem David looked out over Israel. He had conquered the Philistines and all surrounding peoples, but the strifes, the battles, the struggles inevitably aged him beyond his years. Wars had now ceased in David's reign, and the wealth of conquered peoples was brought to Jerusalem. David's power had grown and his careful seclusion had also grown. Also his growing age and infirmity prevented him from mingling as much with his people as aforetime. Through his exclusiveness he had become almost a legendary figure. He was not loved less by the people, but he became at last like one of the ancient Greek gods dwelling in mists apart. Time and age had increased his wisdom, and he was greater than his past or present.

In his palace the spear of office and his harp were ever at his side. Sitting there in his huge chair, infirm yet capable

and commanding and often in counsel with his staff, he poured out his soul in the Psalms—that blessed inheritance of the Jewish people and of all the world. His own family held it an august privilege when he chanted to them the ancient story of Israel's wanderings and captivities. David's voice was not so powerful as it once had been, but its sweetness and mystic distance were ever there. It was as though the voice came from beyond the far-off hills, a call from the places that Abraham trod.

David thought constantly of his son Solomon, and he watched his daily growth with approval. Solomon lived with the prophet Nathan, who gave his life to this promising and aspiring mind. When not doing his daily duties as King or chanting to his family, David's eyes were ever turned to where Solomon worked and lived.

As long as David held courts all Israel flocked to them, but now that they had ceased, Adonijah saw the chance for his own advance. Not so handsome as Absalom but more adroit, he played upon the feelings of the people. He indirectly said to them that in case of trouble with foreign nations David was too old to lead his armies. He travelled with a suite from the land of Edom to Manasseh, gathering popularity as he went. He had many horses, was always richly attired and he knew well that display would affect the minds of the people then as it affects the public mind today. Political gratitude has never been marked at any time on earth.

When he had passed, people said: "King David is old. He can no longer fight. We may not be in danger now, but if peril should come he must depend on others. Adonijah is young, he is a valiant soldier. He could lead us well—aye, he could lead us well!"

Adonijah had prepared chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run before him, as Absalom had done. Yet he moved with greater discretion than Absalom. He had a saner mind, and he turned to his father's chief friends and workers, and, though bold, it did its work. He summoned Joab and Abia-

thar the priest to him, and he said to Joab: "My father is old; he is infirm, unfit to govern. I am young, I have brains, and if thou wilt come with me thou shalt be sarsaba of my army."

Joab had two virtues: a capacity to fight and love of his native land; yet he was ever unscrupulous, ever ambitious, and now eager to remain sarsaba and knowing that King David's day was nearly done, he said: "Thou art King David's eldest son, thou dost rightly inherit. I will lead thy army; I will follow thee in all."

This pleased Adonijah and he kissed Joab on both cheeks.

Joab remembered Bathsheba and Solomon, her younger son and how David loved him. But Solomon, amiable, vigorous and handsome, was untried, and Adonijah was surer.

Abiathar, who ever since his father was slain at Nob had been David's friend and close to him, hearing what Joab said and wishing to be chief priest, said: "Adonijah, I also go with thee, and I will serve thee to the end."

But Zadok the prophet, and Benaiah, and Jehoshaphat and Sheva and Adoniram, and Azmaveth, and Jehonethan, and Ezri, and Baal-haran, and Shitrai, and Nathan the prophet and many mighty men with David did not follow Adonijah. At length Adonijah, having travelled through the one hundred and eighty miles north and south of Israel and the fifty miles on either side, gathered chief men of the tribes together and spoke.

"We are all men of Israel. I love my father, King David, as do ye all, but he is aged and infirm. I have here beside me Joab, the King's sarsaba, and I have also Abiathar the priest. They have long been with him. They his shaggy that the time has come to have a younger king, [illegible] Solam the rightful heir."

Murmurs of approval ran through the gathering of Jews in the western city. Adonijah and his friends were all well dressed and all the sycophants about the royal rebel were in colours of brown and scarlet and blue and white, and their

faces shone with hope and the day was a day of sun. The city glowed. Much was in favour of Adonijah.

At length the head of a tribe cried: "Adonijah—Adonijah for King!" And all the people shouted: "Adonijah—Adonijah, King of Israel!"

This shouting ran through the streets of the western city, even to the gates. Then straightway Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle and in the chamber of his great house he feasted.

None of David's brothers were with Adonijah, for all were dead save Raddai and Ozem, who were rulers in Israel. They were loyal to the King.

Meantime David in his palace felt the fires of life fading, and Bathsheba, ever near him, could do little for him—his heart was freezing fast against the sun of life, but she was ever dear to him. She had favourably moved all who came her way and had helped him to build up his power.

One day word was brought to Nathan that the people of the western city where Joab ruled had made Adonijah King of Israel.

Nathan hastened to the palace and sought Bathsheba. His grey head shook with feeling as he spoke: "Word has come that Adonijah reigns in the western city. Dost thou not hear the distant shouting?"

Bathsheba grew pale and her eyes filled with anger. "The western city—where Joab rules! That evil soul!"

"Joab and Abiathar are with him, alas!"

Bathsheba's hands clenched at her sides and her lips trem- young, he is a yes, a great general, yet ever at heart hating David. But Abiathar, whose father's murder David avenged —that parasite priest!"

"Did not King David say that Solomon should reign? Why then Adonijah, the rebel?"

"I have a pledge of David and it shall be kept. Who is Adonijah that he should displace my son, whom thou hast

fed with wisdom? Nay! Jerusalem shall live in memory of David but also of Solomon!"

Nathan's eyes saddened. "They forget who made them great. A people's gratitude has no home here!"

Bathsheba angrily shook her head and then entered David's chamber. She made low obeisance before him. David saw the fury in her eyes. "What is in thy mind, Bathsheba?"

"Listen to that distant shouting. Nathan brings word it is for thy son, Adonijah. He has made himself King in the western city where Joab rules!"

David rose slowly to his feet, and all the dignity and force of past years came to him. "Adonijah!" Fire flashed from the eyes that never faded.

"Yes, Adonijah! And Joab and Abiathar are with him."

"First Absalom and now Adonijah! And I loved them both! They shall not prevail, Joab and Abiathar. Joab, my sarsaba, gone at last from me. Traitor to his King! As for Abiathar, yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me! But I am still King of Israel. This is but the rattle of pebbles on the beach. Bring Nathan to me."

A moment later Nathan entered to the King, who sternly spoke. "Bathsheba has told me all. As the Lord liveth, Solomon shall reign!" For this Bathsheba had waited, and not yet wholly discerning, she said: "May King David live for ever!"

David's voice rang clear. "Bring hither Zadok, the prophet and Benaiah, son of Jehoida."

They came. He looked at them from under his shaggy brows, his eyes glowing. "Take my servants, cause Solomon to ride upon my own mule. Bring him down to the spring of Gihon and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there over Israel. Then blow ye the trumpets and say: 'God save King Solomon.'" David held his body steady, and power was now in his feeble limbs.

In her heart Bathsheba was elated. Her son would be King now—now!

David gazed wistfully at them all. "I have lived long—I have loved the Lord and Israel more than all."

Nathan alone entered his house. Solomon, now eighteen years of age, sat with hands clasped between his knees and his head bowed, thinking. How beautiful life was to him, who had been brought up without care or anxiety!

As Nathan entered he got to his feet. Solomon, looking at him steadily, said: "Israel speaks in thine eyes!"

"Behold, I come with Zadok and Benaiah by command of King David to take thee to the spring of the Upper Gihon. There under the crest of Mount Zion thou shalt be anointed King of Israel!"

Solomon, ever modest, was dumbfounded. After a moment he spoke: "I, King of Israel? No, ah, no, I am too young for such high honour. Israel has but one King!"

Nathan shook his head in protest. "But Adonijah, thine elder brother, has made himself King in the western city and now feasts with Joab and Abiathar in his home."

Solomon was startled. "Adonijah rebelled against his own father. There can be but one King in Israel—David, who has made it great!"

Nathan eagerly spoke. "This has been said to the King, but he would crown thee while he still lives to advise thee in thy reign. Thou art very young. Thou shalt learn from King David to serve thy people well!"

Solomon's eyes opened wide and his lips grew firm. Suddenly there swept before him the vision of the land which, founded by exiles and wanderers, was now like one vast continuing city. He had been trained to meditation. His soul's eye saw it all, and he said solemnly: "By his command I will become King of Israel. I shall learn wisdom from my father."

He drew himself up. He was slim, handsome, and clean-

shaven. The eyes were the eyes of his mother, Bathsheba, but his soul was the soul of King David.

Nathan placed a new turban on his head and clothed him in a beautiful robe of purple and dark red and white. Then he opened the door, and Zadok and Benaiah entered. Zadok stooped over Solomon's hand and kissed it. Then they issued from the house. Solomon rode on King David's white mule and the others were mounted also, and followed by the gathering crowds of people they went to the Upper Gihon in the valley of Kidron. It was morning and all the land seemed steeped in radiance. Never was there a more beautiful scene than that at the spring of the Upper Gihon. As far as eye could see was ardent glow. The deep valley was alive, and overhead flew pigeons and doves, and innumerable happy birds sang joyously as Solomon, in his purple robe and turban, came to the place of the anointing. It was as though the Ruler of all the world would say: "In the valley thy anointing, but on the mountain tops thy government. Come, thou son of Israel!"

There Zadok with a horn of oil anointed Solomon, and the trumpet was blown at command of Benaiah by one of the Gibborim, and the people now shouted: "God save King Solomon!"

They ran rejoicing through the streets, for here was one younger than Adonijah, more handsome, more intellectual and with a face of piety and beauty. The people had ever loved Solomon, and now that David had made him King their hearts swung round from the reckless adventurous Adonijah, whom Hushai had well read long ago in the garden of the palace. As they rode to David's palace, crowds gathered, and in the western city Adonijah and all his guests were feasting. Speeches of praise had been made, and Adonijah had mapped out the place of fighting with Joab at his side. All seemed well, but suddenly they all started at the cries from the streets. When Joab heard the trumpets he said: "Wherefore is the city in an uproar?"

Jonadab, son of Abiathar, entered in agitation, and Adonijah was suddenly troubled by the shouting and excitement in the city. "Dost thou bring good tidings?"

"Nay, not for thee! Solomon has ridden on the King's mule to his anointing at the spring of Gihon. Thy father hath made him King. The people bless David saying: 'God make Solomon's throne greater than the throne thou hast made so great.' And also thus says King David: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who giveth one to sit on my throne this day.'"

Adonijah, now affrighted, said: "I had not looked for this. Solomon is young and has been trained by Nathan. The people love him. Flee all of ye, for I fear for our lives."

Joab gloomily spoke. "There is no hope now. Our lives hang by the slimmest thread."

They all fled from the house and went every man his way.

At David's palace, Solomon entered with Nathan and Zadok and many people. They went with stately ceremony to the throne-room, where David was with Bathsheba. David placed a hand on Bathsheba's arm and looked deeply into her eyes. Then he rose from his throne, and as Solomon and the prophets and the people entered, waved a welcoming hand. Solomon's face was shining, but he moved slowly. David stood still till Solomon came near, then he stepped down. Taking both of Solomon's hands, he escorted him to the throne and placed him there. Taking from his own head the talent of gold, he set it on Solomon's head and in his hands he gave his spear, the symbol of his ruling. Then he kissed Solomon on both cheeks. Moving backward with stately steps, he reached out his hand.

"Solomon, thou art now King of Israel. To Jehovah's hands I yield thee. Peace, wisdom and prosperity be with thee, son of Israel, till thy day is done."

Bathsheba's eyes were moist. "My son—my son, the King!" she said with trembling lips.

Now the people in the chamber cheered and many fell on their knees in joy.

David spoke to the people. "My work for Israel is done; my life's labour ended." He turned again, bowed low to Solomon, who rose and gazed at him lovingly.

Solomon, in whose eyes had come the spirit of wisdom that would mark the greater part of his long reign, now said in a broken voice, "My father, in love of Israel thou hast given me thy throne. Remembering thee ever here where thou hast sat, I will seek the good of our beloved people."

David looked at him tenderly. "I have lived long, I am old—on thee is the dew of youth. Now have I gladly seen the people of Israel cheer thee here. Thou shalt drink of the brook of peace by the way. Lift up thy head to thy future, King Solomon."

He turned now to the exit of the chamber, and waved back all who would have followed him. Then he moved with greater dignity than he had ever shown. It was like the passing of some benignant figure from the stage of time.

Never was David so great as when putting all material things from him—the pomp of glory of his throne, the pride of kingship which he had loved.

In his own chamber he sat down again in meditation. At last he raised his head. "To do this, Thou didst give me strength, O Lord."

Then he sat back closing his eyes in reverie, and the darkness of evening came.

Out in Jerusalem there was great excitement and gladness. All in an hour or more had the fate of Israel been changed. Adonijah had proclaimed himself king. Solomon had been crowned, and David had retired from the throne. Sensation had been heaped upon sensation. Not since Jericho had fallen under Joshua had Israel been more agitated. People swarmed in the streets, and those who had been in the palace told amazing tales of Solomon's crowning and David's speeches.

It was as though Jerusalem was in a volcano of miraculous events.

Not long after the crowning Benaiah came to Solomon in the throne-room where he sat with David's council. Benaiah said: "Adonijah, Joab, Abiathar and all have fled, each after his own mind. But Adonijah hath caught hold on the horns of the altar at Mount Moriah. He says: 'Will King Solomon slay his servant with the sword?' "

Solomon quietly answered: "If he should show himself a worthy man there shall not a hair of him fall to the earth, but if wickedness be found in him he shall die. Fetch him here."

When Benaiah left the palace the people cheered him. He was ever popular and was now the most noted man in the army. Abishai, Joab's brother, was a general, but he was old, and he was the brother of a rebel, and Benaiah was the trusted friend of David and of Solomon. Benaiah paid no heed to them. He hastened to Adonijah at the altar, the people following. Many of them had cheered Adonijah and now he was as naught, and they despised him, for their eyes had been opened.

He found Adonijah pale and distraught and looking little like a prince of Israel. He hung agitated to the horns of the altar. As Benaiah drew near Adonijah shrank from him, and his voice trembled. "What would Solomon do to me?"

"Thus spake Solomon: 'If he should show himself a worthy man, not a hair of his head shall fall to the earth.' "

Adonijah withdrew his hands from the altar. His voice was bitter now. "None who cheered me at my crowning is with me now—I am alone. In despair I go with thee."

As he went in charge of Benaiah, people scoffed at him and some spat upon the ground before him.

In the throne-room Adonijah bowed to the ground. "O King, live a thousand years. Behold, I have sinned."

Solomon gazed steadily at his treacherous brother. In his

eyes was justice, yet generous thought. "Adonijah, thou wouldst have taken our father's throne and slain him—he who built up Israel. Heed me well. If thou dost prove in anything unfaithful, thy head shall fall. I forgive thee thy revolt—nay, David thy father forgives thee! See well that thou play fair in this kingdom Adonijah."

Adonijah humbled himself again. "I will keep faith with thee." Then turning, he left for his home, grateful yet mourning, and none cheered him as he passed.

Joab had fled, and within a darkened room of his home with his family he awaited he knew not what. Abishai, his brother, came from David's palace and soberly reproved him, and Joab made no answer. He sat with bowed head. His treachery had broken him. The heart in him was dead.

When Adonijah was gone, Solomon bade Benaiah wait. Then in presence of his council he spoke. "Thou hast proved thyself, Benaiah. I make thee now sarsaba in Joab's place. Mayest thou have strength and wisdom."

Benaiah was astounded by the promotion. "I shall learn from thee, O King, as I have from thy father."

Solomon smiled at him. "David is still King of Israel. He sits yonder in his chamber, yet he is with me here. His crown and spear are mine, but his soul belongs to Israel."

CHAPTER LIX

THE PROMISED LAND

KING David now came serenely to the end of his days. His face was quiet, yet in his eyes was profound light, for he was seeing beyond this world. Abishag, the Shunamite, served his simple wants, and Bathsheba was ever near him. His sons when free from their public duties—for they all had office under Solomon as they had had under him—were often with him, though he seldom spoke to them.

One day he asked his attendants to move his great chair to the window. They did so, and there he sat with his people behind him, gazing first at the city he had made his capital and then beyond it. The mauve and blue and delicate purple and amethyst mists rising from the hills of Moab, met his aged eyes. He could see the Mount of Olives, which he had climbed so often and where he had prayed to be delivered from Absalom.

His face had grown more majestic, and with thankful heart he daily saw the wise ruling of Solomon. He was never abroad in the streets, but his name was blessed by the people. He had yielded office, but the sacrifice of his kingship and the pomp of the ruler had drawn all closer to him.

One day he motioned everyone from the room save Solomon. The King, ever respectful to his father, would not sit in his presence save when others were there—and then only to uphold his dignity as ruler. When alone he always stood composed and attentive. David begged him to be seated now. For long they sat in silence, Solomon feeling that an important statement would be made by David.

At last David spoke. "My son, I soon shall go the way of all the earth. I have watched thy ruling with joy. Thou dost show thyself strong and wise. Thy reign shall be like a vineyard yielding goodly fruit. The north and the south winds shall blow, the rains come and all the land shall flourish and be at peace."

He drew himself up firmly, and from under heavy brows his eyes shone with the last radiance of his days.

"And now I charge thee, Solomon: I have grown old in labour for Israel, and I would not have my labours come to naught. I made thee King that, living, I might still counsel thee. Should Joab, the skilful, unscrupulous soldier turn against thee, he might sorely trouble again this land. It might then fare ill with thee. I could fight him, for I know him well, but thou dost not. Under me he helped build Israel, but he left me in my old days. He slew Abner and Absalom

and Amasa and joined Adonijah against me." Lifting his head firmly now he added: "In sadness I say it, for thine own good and that of Israel send him to his grave. Alas, that he must die! As for Abiathar, he was with me for long years, and he treacherously treated me. He went with Adonijah. Do with him as thou thinkest well. Now lastly, I have been a man of blood and I may not build the Temple of the Lord, but I give thee here a pattern of the Temple, and I leave thee riches wherewith to build it. Fear not nor be dismayed, for Jehovah will be with thee: He will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

Solomon, who had listened intently, bowed his head in silence before his father. What David had said to him touched wide borders of influence and duty. David, seeing that Solomon was about to speak, shook his head. "Do not answer me now. I pray thee, think upon it."

After a long silence he spoke. "Our days on earth are as a shadow and there is no abiding." Then he lifted his eyes devoutly. "Thou art my lamp, Thou wilt lighten my darkness. Thou art my deliverer? O Jehovah, my soul thirsteth after Thee!"

Solomon stooped over and kissed David's hand. David drew him near and kissed him on both cheeks. He smiled tenderly. "King of Israel and child of my heart!"

Time went on and David's strength steadily declined. He felt that the day of his going hence had come. He summoned his family, and last of all Solomon, who came with his council. They all bowed before the prostrate King, and Solomon kissed his hand and sat at his head.

Nearer to David than all save Bathsheba was Leah. She was still close to David. She knew his days were drawing to an end, and now in the darkened room she tenderly smiled into his eyes, for to her going hence was marching from night to morning.

Lokman stood near, and he gazed sadly at David. David's

eyes met his and he smiled. Lokman, with bowed head, turned away. Life was now but a desert to him.

David made a gesture of farewell to his sons, saying only: "Obey and serve!"

Daniel, Shephatiah, Ithream, Phalna, Emmos, Jeban and other sons were present, and they bowed low at David's words and showed great emotion. Daniel spoke. "We will obey, my father."

All was quiet in the chamber. There could only be heard David's heavy breathing and the twitter of birds through the palace windows. David seemed asleep, but suddenly his eyes opened wide and he gazed before him into space. He saw Mount Hermon and all Syria to Damascus which he had made his own. He saw Mount Gilboa and the battle where Saul and his sons were slain. He saw Jonathan fighting against the many Philistines and at last Jonathan fall dying, and now he stretched out his trembling arms and murmured—"Jonathan! Jonathan!"

His eyes closed and he lay still. His end was coming. With a last effort he drew himself up slowly and raised his eyes. "Unto Thee! Unto Thee, O God!"

He sank backwards into Bathsheba's arms and his breathing ceased. Solomon closed his eyes and crossed his hands upon his breast. Then he said brokenly: "Beloved father, thou art gone! Our people mourn for thee."

In the city of David lamentation could be heard everywhere within the seven gates and far beyond. It reached Bethlehem where he was born, and Bethel and Nablus and Hebron and Mount Carmel and Tabor and Mount Gilboa, and from Dan to Beersheba and all the land and to countries bordering Palestine. The students of Ramah and the people marched sorrowing to Jerusalem. It came home to them all that there had passed from toil and strife and darkness and light the greatest figure Israel ever knew.

The body was anointed and wrapped in spices, and candles burnt at his head and feet. Thousands visited the palace to

see David lying in full regalia, his face at peace, his soul at rest. Eternity was his at last.

On the third day envoys of the peoples David had conquered arrived at Jerusalem—Syrians, Amalekites, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Philistines, to pay tribute to their conqueror. By similar instinct they had all come. One by one they saluted each other and talked together, then with the coming of the Syrian they entered the palace, led by Benaiah.

Solomon received them in the throne-room, wondering what was their will. The Philistine said: "We come to pay tribute to your father, King David. We know his greatness. Here are our swords, O King." They all drew their swords and bowed and presented them, but Solomon, with protesting gesture, said: "I thank ye all. Nay, keep your swords. Ye pay high tribute to my father in this city of David. His sword is sheathed, but his spirit lives."

Then they all sat at meat in the palace and were waited on by Solomon's attendants with royal ceremony, and Benaiah and Abishai and Ittai and other generals were with them as they ate.

King David's body was carried from the palace on a litter by the chief men of the state—all members of his council and his generals. Behind King Solomon marched the wives, then the sons and brothers, and after them the envoys with their weapons reversed. When the people saw these stately men in their brilliant uniforms they marvelled greatly. They shook their heads in wonder and said to each other: "Our David was greater than we knew. See these men from conquered nations come to honour him!"

Their hearts were lifted up in pride. Jehovah had brought the fear of Him upon all nations.

The students of Ramah, who had kept alive the spirit of David ever since his brief residence among them by singing

the Psalms he had made, were now placed by Benaiah in a group behind Nathan and Zadok, the prophets. They were not of David's youthful time, but they had under Gad called him to repentance after Gabraoth Hill, and they sang his praises now as he went to his last resting-place, of which no man knows today. Their voices rang out clearly:

"I will say of the Lord He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust.

"A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.

"For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.

"Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him in trouble. I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him My salvation."

There was deep feeling in all breasts. It was a chant of life and not of death. Glory was in it all.

Ten thousand soldiers under Tachmonite marched ahead of the procession. The Gibborim under Benaiah were near the bier and David's spear was carried by Abishai, the aged general, and his harp by Ittai. Palm branches were born by young girls before the body of David. In front of the bier were Nathan and Zadok the prophets, and with them their attendants bearing incense.

Nathan the prophet, moved by the wailing of the people, raised his voice and cried aloud with upraised arm: "Thy dayspring from on High hath visited us."

These words rang out clearly over the heads of all, and a new emotion swept through them. Never had the hearts of Israel been so raised, yet bowed down: raised exaltedly in memory of the great life gone, bowed with woe that never again on earth should the voice of David be heard or his face be seen.

On David's death Lokman had broken, and he had been seized by illness. To David he had been jester, philosopher and friend. He had pierced all of the King's faults for love

of the man, but he had also deeply realized David's greatness, and now he felt his own end near. In vain he tried to rise from his bed and go to David's burial. He could hear the wailing and the singing, and at last he dragged himself to the roof of the palace, and there he saw the great procession pass.

Feeling his pulses almost stop and his body growing cold, his eyes raised to the sky, and when Nathan's words rang out with the last effort of life his voice rose. "Thy star of Bethlehem shall shine for ever. I follow thee, my master," he said, and then sank back and fell lifeless upon the palace roof.

At last David was lowered with august ceremony to his grave. The people wailed and threw ashes on their heads and rent their clothes, and at the tomb and from every gate of the city the trumpets blew the last acclaim.

Then a voice from Ramah chanted: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be raised up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in."

Bathsheba raised her forlorn head at these words, for she had heard them in the streets of Bethlehem in her mother's arms. Her body trembled and she wept, but all she had wished had come to her and her heart was at peace.

NOTE

ADONIJAH sought Bathsheba saying he wished to marry Abishag, David's concubine. This was dire, but those were primitive days when primitive things were done. Bathsheba was shocked, but took his request to Solomon. Solomon's mind burned with indignation. Amnon had shamed the royal house and now Adonijah would add to that shame by marrying his own father's concubine. He commanded Benaiah to slay Adonijah in the streets before the people, and this was done.

Presently Solomon, fulfilling David's last injunction, sent

for Abiathar and ordered him to Anatoth where he was born, but no longer as a priest—as a peasant, and to look upon his face no more.

The despairing Joab, who heard of Adonijah's and Abiathar's fate, had taken refuge at the altar of the Tabernacle, when word of this was brought to him. Solomon ordered Benaiah to slay Joab even at the altar. There Benaiah killed the faithless Joab with one stroke of the sword, and he was buried by his brother Abishai and his family at his own home.

So passed for ever those who had been traitors to King David.

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